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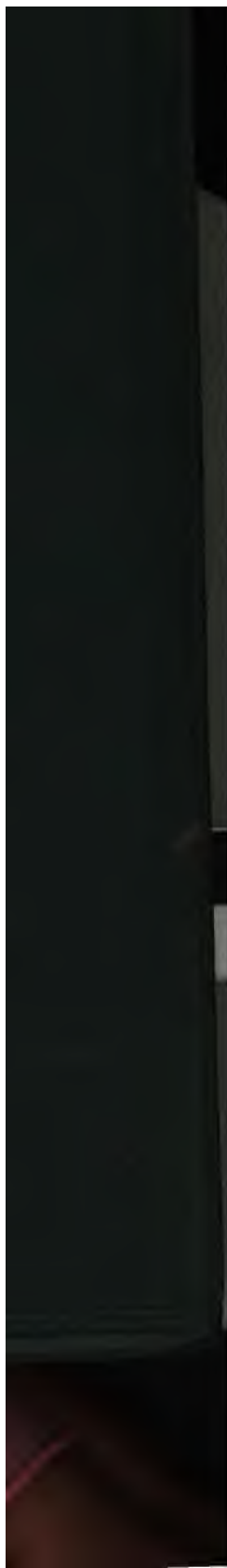
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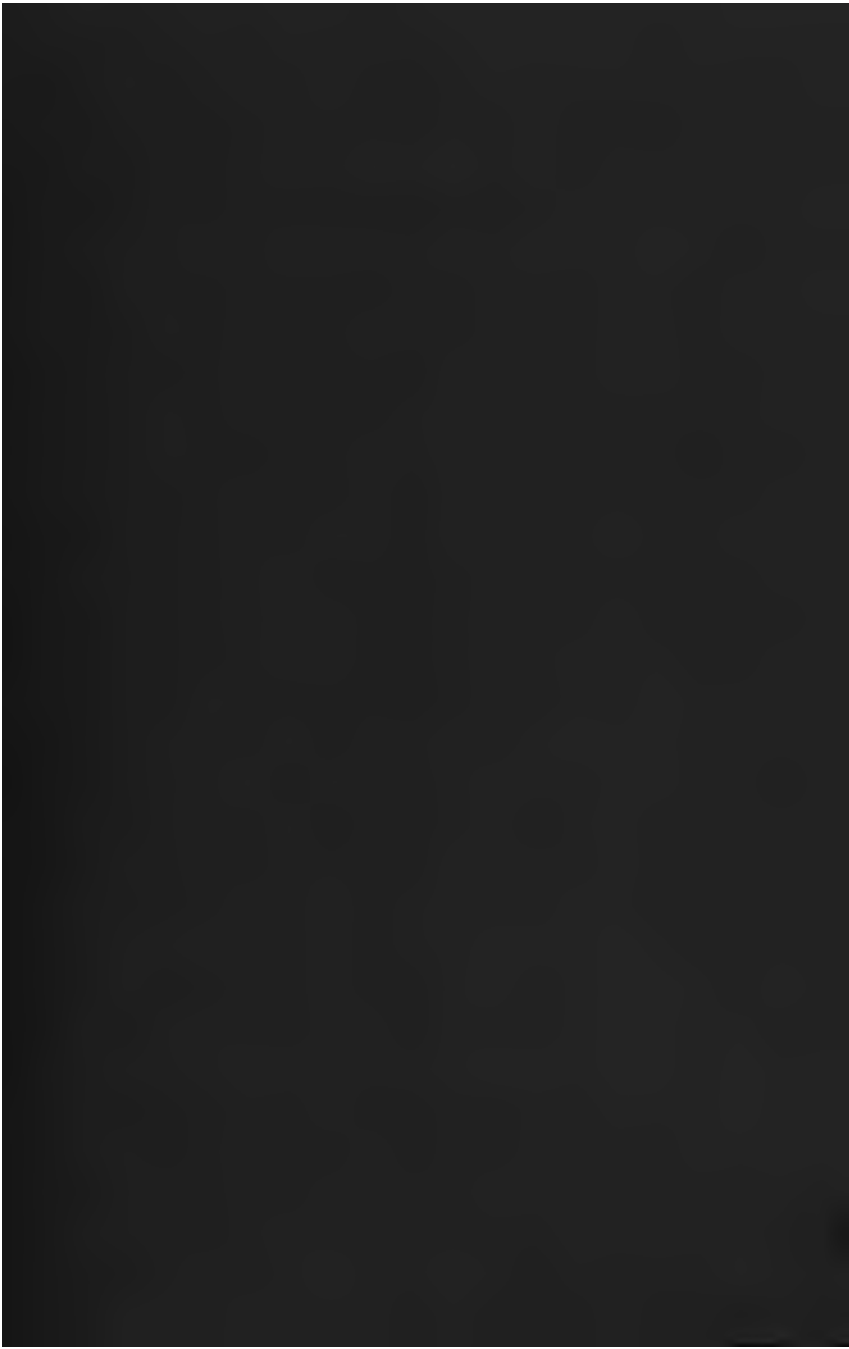
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A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE:

A Novel,

FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY MRS. DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "THE TWO CATHERINES," "SAVILE HOUSE," "THE
ARTIST'S FAMILY," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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SAMPSON LOW, SON, AND MARSTON,
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A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

THE clothes, and everything belonging to the unfortunate lady deceased, underwent a minute examination, for the purpose of discovering, if possible, who she really was, in order that her friends, who were supposed to be in Paris, might at once be communicated with. In the pocket of her dress was found an embroidered handkerchief, with the initials "C. G." marked upon it, the same as those engraved upon the purse which had been found

in Arnold's possession. This circumstance alone might tell sadly against him. The next thing they discovered was a pocket-book, in the pages of which were sundry entries relating to trivial domestic affairs. They were written in a neat, ladylike hand, but contained nothing which gave a clue to the writer. The pockets of the book were empty, but on shaking it a letter fell from between the leaves. This letter was read attentively. It related chiefly to family affairs, and contained a few general allusions, unintelligible and uninteresting to the uninitiated reader. Once, in a long postscript, the word "Arnold" occurred, and the bearer of that name was made the object of enthusiastic praise, evidently the outpouring of one who loved him. The epistle was addressed to "Madame Gautier," at Beauvais, and signed "Caroline Elmore." Elmore! That was the very name the suspected man had given. He had made no attempt to disguise it. But then,

perhaps he was ignorant of the existence of the letter, which evidently bore some reference to him, and possibly thought it best to be truthful in one point at least. His innocence, under existing circumstances, seemed more than doubtful—almost impossible; at best, highly improbable. Search, however, for Dr. La Belle was about to be made at Rouen, in whose power it lay to make the matter clearer, if not quite clear, so far as Arnold Elmore was concerned.

Arnold felt far more at ease when his journey was actually begun with M. Herchel. He was most anxious to see Dr. La Belle, who would, of course, substantiate his story in every particular, and exonerate him at once from the odious suspicion that now clung to him. He was also desirous of hearing something more of the history of the dead woman, with whose fate he had become so mysteriously connected. Her friends were still in ignorance of her tragic end, (he had ascer-

tained so much from M. Herchel), and he busied himself in conjecturing many things concerning her. She might have a husband—children—perhaps a son, like himself, to grieve for her. He shuddered as he thought of her lying stiff and stark on the black marble slab in the Morgue, exposed to the gaze of the curious and the remarks of heedless strangers.

M. Herchel proved to be a pleasant travelling companion, full of intelligence, and well stocked with the amusing chit-chat of the day. By degrees, however, the conversation shifted round to the important matter, now the subject of investigation, in which they were both deeply interested. M. Herchel, of course, was well aware of the result of the examination of the deceased lady, and the existence of the letter signed "Caroline Elmore" puzzled him greatly, and seemed to point to Arnold as the guilty party, more than any of the other circumstances by

which the extraordinary case was surrounded. It need hardly be stated that Arnold was in complete ignorance of the matter. He only knew that the lady was dead and had not yet been identified. He and M. Herchel conversed upon the subject, wondering at some points and reflecting upon others. While Arnold thought they were merely indulging in a desultory conversation, he was in reality undergoing a strict cross-examination. M. Herchel made many inquiries respecting London and the ways and means of society.

"I think you said your family resides in Hyde Park Terrace?" he once said.

"Yes," replied Arnold, "but my family is very limited. My dear mother is a widow, and I am her only son. If she only knew of my present position now, I believe she would break her heart." He sighed heavily as he spoke.

"It was very strange, that mistake of yours.

You remember, when you first saw the dead woman's face, you said it was your mother's."

"Yes," said Arnold; "it was strange. I never saw the lady's living face, but when dead it did certainly resemble my mother's. In my excitement I uttered my thought aloud."

"Your name, I think you said, was Arnold Elmore?"

"Yes."

"And your mother's name——?"

"Is Elmore also, but her Christian name is Caroline."

"I am always very particular respecting names," said M. Herchel, making some fresh notes in his pocket-book. "You told me the name of your travelling companion, but I have forgotten it."

"Madame Santron; at least, that was the name by which she was introduced to me."

"Umph!" said M. Herchel, "people sometimes travel by false names—that is, when they have

some special reason for concealing the true ones."

"Do you think that is the case in the present instance?" inquired Arnold, eagerly. "Of course they have searched the body. Have they discovered anything?"

M. Herchel misunderstood Arnold's eager anxiety. He looked at him with a keen, searching eye as he answered, coolly—

"That is a question which it is out of my power to answer. You will learn everything when the right time comes."

"I shall be very glad when the right time has come and gone," said Arnold, excitedly. "I suppose as soon as Dr. La Belle has explained this matter to the satisfaction of the authorities I shall be set free?"

"Certainly, *if* Dr. La Belle does so explain matters," said M. Herchel, "you will be liberated immediately."

"*If!*" repeated Arnold, with some irritability, for the "*if*" seemed to imply that there was a doubt in M. Herchel's mind. "There is no *if* in the matter; it is quite certain that he *can*, and, of course, *will*, exculpate me at once."

"In that case, I suppose you will be very glad to resume your travels, that is, if you are travelling wholly for pleasure. Perhaps you are going to visit some relations in this country?"

"No, indeed," replied Arnold; "for I have no relations here; at least," he added, correcting himself, "none that I have ever seen or that I should care to visit."

"Our relations are not always our best friends," observed M. Herchel, who fancied he was getting on the right scent now.

"I do not mean to insinuate that we are not friends," replied Arnold.

"Still, from what you have said you cannot

be on the most amicable terms," said M. Herchel, smiling blandly.

"Oh, we are on as good terms as it is possible for people to be who have never met and never corresponded with each other," said Arnold.

"I see how it is," said M. Herchel, with seeming carelessness. "I suppose you have expectations, or are, perhaps, heir to some large property; and one man rarely likes another who is to succeed him."

"On the contrary, I have no expectations at all, and the only relative I have in France is a lady, my mother's sister, whom I have never seen. The fact is, there are some very painful circumstances connected with her marriage, which took place privately, and against the wishes of her friends; and by degrees she has become completely severed from her family ties and connections. My mother is the only one who corresponds with her, and that but seldom, for

long-continued years of absence will weaken even the strongest ties."

M. Herchel was silent for some minutes. There was something so honest and straightforward in Arnold's manner, he was so unreserved and frank in his answers, that even to the keen detective's eye it seemed impossible that he could be playing a part. After some little reflection he said—

"Have you any reason to believe that her husband, Monsieur —, I beg your pardon, I forget his name."

"I do not think I have mentioned it," interrupted Arnold, smiling, "but I will tell you now; it is rather an uncommon name, Gautier."

"Is M. Gautier supposed to have lived on very affectionate terms with his wife?"

"I really cannot say from my own knowledge," replied Arnold; "but, judging from many little things I have heard, I should say, decidedly not."

"Pray excuse me if I seem too inquisitorial in my manner," said M. Herchel, "but I am really interested in your relatives: the name of Gautier is familiar to me. Have you any idea where M. Gautier is to be found at the present time?"

"I should suppose he would be found on his own estate. I believe he has an estate at Beauvais. Why do you ask?"

"Merely from curiosity. I should like to know something of every man and woman in all France. Knowledge is power, you know, and I never lose an opportunity of gaining it; every scrap of information I get I turn to some use or other."

"I am afraid that any information I could give you on any subject would be but a superfluous addition to your stock of knowledge," said Arnold, "for I am a stranger, and do not know a soul in France, not even, as I have already told you, my own relatives."

"Then, if you know no man, I suppose you can have no enemy, unless M. Gautier be one?"

"That is simply impossible," replied Arnold, "since we are perfect strangers, and whatever passes between my mother and her sister is unknown to me; indeed, I have sometimes wondered why my mother is not more communicative on such matters: she rarely mentions even her sister's name."

"I think we must be very near our destination," said M. Herchel, letting down the window of the carriage and looking out. "I know this part of the country very well, and the next station is certainly Rouen."

"I am glad of it," said Arnold, heartily; "I am only too anxious to solve this mystery, and clear myself from the odium that now rests upon me; for I admit that my unfortunate position justifies suspicion. But here we are at Rouen," he added, as the train slackened its speed and

entered the station ; "everything will be explained now : it will soon be over."

It was about two o'clock when they reached Rouen. Arnold would fain have flown through the streets, but M. Herchel took his arm, and he was obliged to moderate his speed to keep step with him. Arnold led the way direct to Dr. La Belle's. Though he had only passed the house once before, and then in the dusk of the evening, he had no difficulty in finding it. There was no mistaking it, for there was the large brass plate upon the door, bearing his name. They knocked, and the door was speedily opened. In answer to their inquiry, they were informed that Dr. La Belle was not at home ; he had, indeed, been absent all night visiting a patient who lay dangerously ill some leagues off.

"Then we will wait until he returns," said M. Herchel, adding, in an under-tone, to Arnold, "we will wait even till to-morrow. I believe the

rascal has decamped. No matter, we shall have him."

Arnold's heart sank when he heard that Dr. La Belle was absent. They were shown into the consulting-room, where they remained about half an hour. As they sat talking of the sad catastrophe, Arnold pointed to a photograph likeness that stood on the mantelpiece.

"There," he said, "that is a portrait of Dr. La Belle, and very like him it is too."

M. Herchel got up, and examined it carefully.

"He does not look like a man who would commit murder," he said, as though he were communing with himself; "but there is no trusting to physiognomy."

"I quite agree with you in both of your remarks," said Arnold. "I feel convinced that if the poor lady was poisoned, it was by accident, not design."

"We shall see," said Herchel; "it does not do to form hasty conclusions."

He had hardly finished speaking when the street door was opened by a latch-key. There was a quick step in the passage, a momentary murmur of voices, then the door of the room opened, and Dr. La Belle stood before them.

"That is he," whispered Arnold, in an undertone.

"So I perceive, from his likeness," returned Herchel, in the same tone.

Arnold advanced with outstretched hand, saying—

"I see you are surprised to see me, Dr. La Belle; I have returned sooner than you expected."

"Sooner than I expected! I really do not understand you. Pray explain yourself," exclaimed the doctor, evincing great surprise.

"Explain myself!" replied Arnold, indignantly.
"Are you not Dr. La Belle?"

“That is my name and profession, certainly. I do not think I made any attempt to deny either the one or the other.”

“And yet you pretend not to know me. Have you forgotten how, and under what circumstances, we parted last night, or rather this morning, at the railway station?”

“I cannot have forgotten that which has never taken place. You must be dreaming, monsieur,” said the doctor, getting indignant.

“I cannot be mistaken, monsieur, and you cannot have forgotten.”

“What am I to understand by this intrusion and insinuation? I repeat, I do not understand you. You must be labouring under some grave mistake. I have not been near the railway station for more than a week. I left Rouen last evening, about nine o’clock, to visit a patient three leagues off, and I remained with him until death ended his sufferings, at six this morning. After seeing

a few patients on my way home, I came here direct."

There was such an air of candour and self-possession in Dr. La Belle, and such seeming truth and honesty in Arnold's manner, that (recollecting the recognition by the latter of Dr. La Belle's likeness, and the natural way in which he claimed the doctor's acquaintance) the detective was puzzled, and looked first at one and then at the other, in a maze of doubt and uncertainty.

As Dr. La Belle proceeded in his last reply, Arnold's face gradually changed from its expression of firm conviction to one of wavering doubt. Something had evidently occurred to puzzle him. After a moment's pause he said, half aloud—

"The face is the same, and the figure; the bearing, unquestionable; but the voice—the voice puzzles me."

"I do not know what your object may be in

so unceremoniously claiming my acquaintance, monsieur, whether it be for good or for evil ; but this much I do know, that, to the best of my belief, this is the first time you and I have ever met," exclaimed Dr. La Belle.

"I begin to doubt the evidence of my own eyes," said Arnold slowly ; "you are, and you are not, the man : my eyes would have singled you out from a thousand ; but your voice is not like his : it is not so soft and musical. Be good enough, M. Herchel, to give me that card you took from me at Paris." Herchel gave him the card. "Is that your card, Dr. La Belle ? It was given to me, I believe by you, on St. Catherine's Mount."

"The card is certainly mine," said the doctor, looking at it ; "but I never gave it to you. I can show by my visiting-book, and by the patients I have visited, that I have not been on St. Catherine's Mount, or near it, for many days—I should say months."

"This is wonderful!" exclaimed Arnold, addressing M. Herchel; "but will you show Dr. La Belle the prescription you also took from me this morning at Paris?"

M. Herchel handed the prescription to Dr. La Belle, who examined it carefully, and then, addressing Arnold, said—

"Where did you obtain that?"

"From Dr. La Belle, on St. Catherine's Mount, two days since," answered Arnold.

"And you saw him write it?" inquired the doctor.

"Yes, he wrote it, or seemed to write it (for I should hesitate before I am sure of anything again) in my presence, and then tore it from his pocket-book."

"Well," exclaimed Dr. La Belle, "this is a most extraordinary affair. I think I can almost swear that this paper is in my handwriting, and that that is my signature; but if it be not, it is a

most perfect imitation of it; for, observe, the signature does not resemble the other part of the writing. But you say you saw the paper torn from a pocket-book; now I have no pocket-book of that size."

"Will you be so obliging as to show me your pocket-book?"

"Certainly," said the doctor, taking it from his pocket.

The first sight of the pocket-book convinced both Herchel and Arnold that the leaf had not been taken from it. They both seemed bewildered, Arnold especially so; for the more Dr. La Belle spoke, the more Arnold seemed to doubt the possibility of his being the man whose brief acquaintance threatened to prove so disastrous. A sudden thought flashed on his brain.

"Monsieur," he asked suddenly, "will you allow me to see you write?"

“Certainly ;” and Dr. La Belle took up a pen and began to write.

Arnold watched him for a second with breathless anxiety, then, heaving a deep sigh, said firmly—

“You are not the man who wrote the prescription for me on St. Catherine’s Mount. I can swear to that now.”

“This is strange !” said M. Herchel. “You are convinced one minute and unconvinced the next. What am I to infer from this variation in your statements ?”

“Anything or nothing : what you please,” replied Arnold, passing his hand across his forehead ; “I am bewildered, and know not what to think myself. I can swear now that this gentleman is not the Dr. La Belle we came here to seek. He, that is, the man who gave the lady into my charge, had a large brown mole on the back of his right hand, between his thumb and forefinger. I ob-

served it particularly when he was writing the prescription. This gentleman has not that mark."

"Now, monsieur, that you are convinced," said Dr. La Belle, "I am not the person you seek, will you oblige me by informing me of the meaning and object of all I have just witnessed?"

M. Herchel having apologised for the trouble they had given him, and thanked him for the willingness with which he had submitted to be examined, detailed the events which had led to the present visit.

"I only wish I could be of service to you," answered the physician, "for it is the duty of every man to forward the ends of justice; as this is a case of mistaken identity, I will tell you something that may, perchance, help you. When I was a lad I had a schoolfellow, whose likeness to me was so extraordinary that we were constantly mistaken for each other; indeed, our

teachers had great difficulty in deciding which was which. I was more than once punished instead of my prototype. Our likeness to each other must have been as strong as that of the two Antipholuses, and frequently gave rise to adventures, some ludicrous, some grave. I remember one, arising from the great similitude of our handwriting. My second self had written a lampoon on the writing-master, and I was flogged as the culprit. Thinking of that circumstance reminds me that he had a mole on the back of his right hand, in the exact spot described by this young gentleman."

"This statement of yours," said M. Herchel, "is almost as strange as this gentleman's adventure, and I fancy I can see a clue to unravel this mystery. Can you tell me where I can find your friend?"

"Not my friend, exactly," replied Dr. La Belle; "for, though we were alike in person, we were

very unlike in sentiment and action. Since I left school I don't think I have seen him more than once or twice ; and, strangely enough, I met him in this town about three months since, when he told me he was on his way to England *viâ* Dieppe. He asked me where I lived, and I gave him my card ; but where he lives, or what is his profession, I am entirely ignorant."

"Will you oblige me with his name?" asked M. Herchel.

"I do not believe that will avail you much ; for I should think him likely to change it as often as he found it convenient ; but his schoolboy name was Michel."

This was all the information they could obtain, if information it could be called ; and yet there seemed to be something in it from which a clue might be gathered. They had gained possession of the fact that a man very like Dr. La Belle had been seen at Rouen about three months ago ; that Dr.

La Belle had given him his card ; that he had a mole on the back of his hand in boyhood ; and that he was, at that period of his life, an indifferent character ; but where to find him, or how to connect him with this mysterious affair, was at present a puzzle.

As they turned to leave the room, M. Herchel's eye fell on the photograph of Dr. La Belle, to which Arnold had directed his attention soon after their arrival.

"That is an admirable likeness of you, monsieur," he said.

"So I am told. I had it taken for the patient I have just lost ; he always had a copy of it with him wherever he went ; he said it exercised a magnetic influence over him."

"Would you deem it a great liberty were I to request you to favour me with a copy of it ? It might be very useful in the search I have to make for the individual who poisoned, or rather, I sus-

pect poisoned, the lady : for, to be candid with you, I do not believe that this young gentleman perpetrated so foul a deed, though he will have to answer for the act, and may, perhaps, be punished for it, unless we can bring it home to some one else; and that, I fear, will be a very difficult matter."

"I will give you one with pleasure," said Dr. La Belle, opening a portfolio, "and I sincerely hope it may aid you in your search. If it should be the means of effecting what you desire, and clearing this gentleman of the crime for which he otherwise will have to answer, I shall be highly gratified."

There being no further information to be obtained from Dr. La Belle, M. Herchel and Arnold took their leave, having again thanked the doctor for his obliging kindness.

"To add a link to the chain of evidence I have collected," said M. Herchel, "I must see the

chemist who made up the prescription." Arnold led him to the shop.

On being shown the prescription, the chemist immediately recognised it, and pointed out the private mark he was accustomed to place on all prescriptions he prepared. He also said that he believed he had seen Dr. La Belle standing outside the shop during the time he was making it up, and thought it strange that the doctor had brought it there, inasmuch as he always patronized M. Rogier, another chemist.

The matter having been traced to its furthest limits, the detective, naturally concluding that the pseudo-doctor La Belle would not stay longer in Rouen than he could help, determined to return to Paris by the next train.

On their arrival at the station M. Herchel asked the chief porter if he knew Dr. La Belle of Rouen.

"Perfectly," was the reply. "He went up to

Paris with a lady by the mail train last night. I remember seeing him here, for I touched my hat to him. He's a very liberal gentleman, and he gave me a franc."

"You are quite sure of that?" asked M. Herchel.

"I am certain. I saw him on the platform with a lady who seemed to be an invalid; and, as I did not see either one or other of them after the train started, I suppose they went on to Paris."

"You are confident that you know Dr. La Belle?" said the detective, at the same time producing the photograph he had just received. "Is that like him?"

"A speaking likeness, monsieur: it is the person I saw on the platform with the lady."

"Will you favour me with your name?" said M. Herchel; "you may hereafter be required to state on oath what you have just told me."

The porter gave his name and address, and

M. Herchel entered the carriage which was to convey them to Paris.

"I think," said the detective, "I begin to see my way, though there will be some difficulty in getting you out of your awkward position. I freely confess that I feel a greater interest in your case than I have ever felt in these matters. I am accustomed to look guilt in the face, and I fancy I can trace it through all its trappings and disguises. From the first I thought you innocent, though the circumstances would lead some to pronounce you guilty. One circumstance especially, which I should be unwise to mention to you, speaks strongly against your innocence."

"I am in God's hands," said Arnold, "and from my heart I say, His will be done."

They reached Paris late in the evening. Arnold was fearfully depressed. The failure in their search for Dr. La Belle was a thing wholly unexpected. If this man, the false Dr. La Belle,

should not be discovered, if all endeavours to find him should prove vain, what then ? what would be the result ? Arnold thought of his mother, of Maude Vernon, but still he murmured, " God's will be done : without His will not even a sparrow may fall." He was sublime in his faith, and yet but mortal in his weakness ; and as he spoke he hid his face and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER II.

STARTLING INTELLIGENCE.

Mrs. ELMORE's mind was very much shaken by the untoward occurrence, or rather ominous intrusion, which had so deeply agitated and distressed her. She could not shake off the impression she had received, that something was wrong with her sister, especially as two or three days had passed without her arrival. Mrs. Elmore lost sight of the silver lining of the cloud. All was dark. Her thoughts travelled from her sister to her son. It seemed as though a heavy cloud had fallen between her

and Maude, darkening the brightness of their inner lives, and obscuring their souls one from the other, leaving nothing visible but the harsh fact that each was wounded. But each strove to cover her scar, and hide it from observation. They had promised Arnold to love and comfort one another, and so far as it was in their power they kept their word; no unkind expression, not even a reproachful look, ever passed between them. Maude watched over Mrs. Elmore with the affection of a daughter; when she looked sad, or appeared cast down, she read to her, talked to her, or told her some pleasant story; and though Mrs. Elmore received and repaid her attention with the old seeming fondness, the former frankness was gone, the genial smile had faded from the countenance, and though the lips uttered the same words, the tone was altered, for the heart was heavy and sick beneath. It was too evident that she could not forgive Maude

Vernon for having rejected her beloved son for a stranger.

Meanwhile Maude felt very far from happy; she wept many bitter tears in secret over their estrangement. She was both grieved and angry: grieved, because Arnold, whom she dearly loved, was unhappy, and his mother, her dearest friend, distressed; and angry, because Mrs. Elmore so openly disapproved of her engagement, and so unreservedly condemned the man she had chosen, apparently from no other cause except that he was a foreigner, and poor. M. St. Pierre's name was, as if by mutual consent, never mentioned by either; there was no longer between them—and it seemed as though there would never be again—that pleasant interchange of thoughts, feelings, and sympathies which makes the harmony of home.

Maude was well aware of one fact, which displeased her greatly. Mrs. Elmore informed her

that she had written to some friends in France, requesting them to obtain and send her all possible intelligence of the family and antecedents of M. St. Pierre. Maude was by no means grateful for, what she termed, this friendly officiousness; but she kept her opinion to herself. She fancied that if she condemned the act, it would seem as though she feared for the result.

M. St. Pierre wrote constantly to Maude, keeping her well informed of the daily events of his life. "They were but few," he said, "for the monotony of a sick-room admitted of little variation. He was watching by his mother's bedside incessantly, and rarely left her, even for a moment, for she could not bear him out of her sight."

The foreign post, that came so often to Maude, came rarely to Mrs. Elmore. Arnold had left London about a week, and she had heard from him but once during that time. She knew that

his movements were uncertain, for he had said in his letter that he was not quite decided whether he would go on to Paris or to Germany; but he promised to write again in a few days. He had not kept his word—what could it mean? Mrs. Elmore was becoming impatient. As another day passed, and brought no tidings of him, she grew anxious, then nervous, hoping and praying that nothing had happened to her son.

“My boy’s letter must have miscarried, Maude,” she said one morning, as she placed herself at the breakfast-table; “for I do not believe he would keep me so long in ignorance of his movements. He knows how anxious I am when he is away from me. I am sure he has written, though I have not received his letters.”

“The post is not in yet,” replied Maude. “You will receive your epistle all in good time—I do believe there it is.” And as she spoke, the postman’s sharp knock was heard at the door. Mrs.

Elmore was half inclined to rush out and answer it herself. She waited expectantly; presently the door opened, and the servant entered with a letter, bearing the Paris post-mark. A bright smile crossed Mrs. Elmore's lips as she stretched out her hand to take it. "At last!" she exclaimed; but the smile vanished as she glanced at the superscription.

"No," she exclaimed, "this letter is not from my son; it is in a strange handwriting."

"Whom can it possibly be from? You have no correspondent in Paris, have you? But don't let us keep wondering and guessing—open it."

Mrs. Elmore did so, and read as follows:—

"MADAME,—A lady has been found dead in a railway carriage, under most mysterious circumstances. She is lying here unknown, and we have no means of identifying her unless we gain some assistance from you. Upon searching the body we discovered a letter addressed to 'Madame

Gautier, Beauvais,' signed 'Caroline Elmore,' and dated from 'Hyde Park Terrace.'

"Should you, madame, feel interested in the deceased, your presence here is earnestly requested, as you may be able to identify the body, and throw some light upon the strange circumstances which have surrounded her death. With many apologies for troubling you, I remain, Madame,

"Your very humble and obedient,

"B. HERCHEL."

The letter fluttered to the ground as Mrs. Elmore dropped her head upon her breast and clasped her hands, exclaiming—

"My sister—my poor sister! Ah! that coffin!"

"I am afraid you have received bad news," said Maude, sympathisingly.

"Read the letter." Maude at once picked it up and glanced hastily through it. She was greatly shocked at its contents, and the consequent

distress of Mrs. Elmore by no means surprised her.

"Terrible!" she exclaimed. "A sudden and suspicious death! and in a railway train!—how awful!"

"Awful indeed!" repeated Mrs. Elmore. "I know she was weary of life; she may have grown too weary, and have ended it. Heaven knows she had her trials; but I never dreamed she would commit such a deed as this. She must have committed suicide."

"It is evident that the authorities in Paris do not think so," said Maude, "or they would not have written a letter like that. Of course we start for Paris at once?"

"We! You mean to say that you will accompany me, then?" said Mrs. Elmore, inquiringly.

"Certainly. You do not suppose I would allow you to go alone. You know," she added, softly, bending down to kiss the widow's cheek, "I was

left here to be your comforter; and, please God, I will be so now, for this is a sore grief."

Full of the energy of youth, Maude at once ordered their travelling-trunk to be packed, sent for a "Bradshaw," and the next moment was rapidly turning over its leaves to ascertain at what time it would be possible to set out on their journey.

"There!" she exclaimed, "a train starts for Dover at *ten*: we may be aboard the steamer at three; and, if we are fortunate, we may even reach Paris to-night. It is now," she added, looking at her watch, "nine. If we make haste we shall be just able to catch the train."

"There may be a letter from Arnold to-morrow," said Mrs. Elmore, her thoughts reverting to her son.

"Well, it can be forwarded to us to Paris," said Maude.

"But we don't know where we may be, or how long we may stay there."

"That can easily be settled," replied Maude. "We can put up at 'Les Trois Empereurs.' We have been there before, and have always been satisfied. Of course we shall have no difficulty in getting accommodation; and we can order our letters to be forwarded there. Come, my dear Mrs. Elmore, we must not waste time; it is useless for us to sit talking and lamenting, we must act promptly. The case is urgent, and we know not how much may depend on our speedy arrival."

Maude was the directing genius of all their proceedings. She made the whole of the preparations, gave directions to the servants, and soon found herself seated in the carriage. Poor Mrs. Elmore seemed to be in a state of helpless bewilderment during the journey, her thoughts divided between her son and her sister.

Our travellers reached Paris that night, though too late to transact any business.

They put up at the "Hôtel de Trois Empereurs,"

as Maude had suggested, and the next morning Mrs. Elmore wrote to M. Herchel, informing him of her arrival. Within an hour after, the officer presented himself at the hotel, and with deferential respect conducted her to the Morgue, where lay the body of the deceased lady. It had been preserved above ground beyond the customary forty-eight hours, in order that an opportunity might be afforded for its identification.

The face was uncovered, and Mrs. Elmore looked upon it. She was deeply affected. Yes, it was indeed her sister. It was twenty years since they had met, but she recognised her at once. Death had smoothed out the wrinkles which sorrow, more than time, had ploughed upon the face, and restored to it, in some degree, the freshness of youth.

The features were cold and rigid, but nevertheless the expression was serene and calm. The world-weary spirit had gained a haven of rest,

and was safe from this world's stormy grief for evermore. The poor heart, with its burthen of untold sorrow, had ceased to beat.

There is always something painful in the aspect of death, even to the young, when it is far off, and its terrors are but indistinctly seen, and the rush and roar of life, with its thousand evanescent charms, rolls between it and them ; still, they know that, in the ebb and flow of life's strong tide, every wave that rolls carries them on and on, until they are drifted on to the shores of eternity, where the wrecker Death awaits them. As time steals on, and the bright roseate hues of life's morning imperceptibly fade into the full flush of noon, melting and changing till they mingle with the gray shadow of evening : then we know that the night is coming, and we would fain stand still and watch and wait, while Death, robed in his solemn terrors and his amaranthine crown, is seen in the distance coming slowly but surely

towards us. We behold him touch and dry up the springs of life as he passes along, and we try to smile, to hush our fears, and still the wild throb that will make nature tremble as the reaper comes nearer and nearer; we strive to prepare a welcome, to receive him as God's messenger, sent to lead us through the valley of the shadow of death into the celestial city of eternal life. But we strive in vain. We cannot choose but shudder at the prospect. No promise of future glory can rob the great destroyer of the mortal terrors he wears to our mortal eyes; and though death sat in calm, peaceful rest on poor Madame Gautier's brow, Mrs. Elmore shuddered as she bent down and kissed the cold forehead: its icy touch chilled her to the heart.

- M. Herchel gave her an account of the extraordinary circumstances connected with her sister's death—at least, so much as he thought it prudent to tell. He suppressed all allusion to Arnold,

whom he now believed to be Mrs. Elmore's son ; he was anxious to spare her any unnecessary pain, for, if matters came to the worst, and nothing farther could be discovered, then the mother's agony would come quickly and sharply enough.

In the common course of law, Arnold must be held responsible, as matters now stood, and appear at the bar of justice to account for his position as best he could. Many might give credence to his story and think him innocent, but circumstances were so strong against him, that the law could do no other than pronounce him guilty. M. Herchel judged, and rightly too, that if Mrs. Elmore were excited on her son's account, she would be less cool and collected in the assistance that might be required of her. He questioned her closely, and begged her to tell him all she knew respecting her sister's life and habits. First he inquired the name of the deceased, and where she lived.

"Her name is Gautier," replied Mrs. Elmore. "I always addressed my letters to her at Beauvais. Her marriage we always considered a disastrous one: it was wholly contrary to the wishes of her family. She married clandestinely, and left England immediately, without even a farewell to those nearest and dearest to her. We believed her to be entirely under the dominion of the man she married; for an infatuated woman is easily ruled, and made a slave, both in mind and body, by the man she loves. He was, I have heard—for I have never seen him—a very handsome, fascinating man, some years younger than herself. She had a good fortune, entirely at her own disposal, which I believe has gradually dwindled away."

"Have you never seen her since her marriage?" inquired M. Herchel.

"No," replied Mrs. Elmore, with a deep sigh; "she never returned to England, even for a day,

and from the time she left it, she has corresponded with none of the family except myself."

"Have you any reason to suppose that her marriage was not a happy one? Did she ever complain of ill-treatment?"

"Well," said Mrs. Elmore, "I cannot say that she ever complained in words, but there was, and has been a strain of sadness, and an occasional outburst of bitterness in her letters, which told me plainly that her heart was slowly breaking. Her marriage had been so strongly condemned at home, that I think she was too proud to own, even to me, that she repented it. I have written to her often, and begged her to return to England, but she never came. Besides, my poor sister was a woman of strong moral principles; she had chosen her husband for better or worse, and, however bad he might prove to be, I think she would abide by her act; if he had killed her inch by inch, I believe she would have clung to him to the last.

It seemed to me that she wished to bury her life, and shroud it in mystery, even from me. I should perhaps tell you that our family solicitor met both her and her husband about a week since, in the train from Paris to Rouen. They then seemed to be on the best terms."

This was all the information Mrs. Elmore could give him; and, having gained thus much, M. Herchel conducted her back to the hotel, and offered to make the arrangements for the interment of the body, so as to save her all unnecessary trouble. Mrs. Elmore gratefully accepted his offer, and he left her with a promise to keep her well informed on all matters having any reference to Madame Gautier's death.

M. Herchel telegraphed at once to Beauvais, desiring M. Gautier's presence in Paris. He received an immediate reply, informing him that M. Gautier had been absent on his travels for some months, and that Madame Gautier had left home

some days back, to proceed, as it was believed, on a visit to some friends in England.

This was all the actual intelligence that was received; but from sundry expressions interspersed throughout the letter, they found that the lady's life had long been a mystery, and had for years furnished a theme for wonder among her neighbours. Friends or acquaintances she had none; and she was seldom seen abroad, except when she visited the poor and needy; for wherever there was suffering or sorrow, there Madame Gautier was to be found, but when the season of joy or prosperity returned, she shrank back into her solitude till the troubles of others again called her forth.

CHAPTER III.

FOILED AGAIN !

WHERE was M. Gautier while his wife was lying dead in the Morgue ? Was he still travelling ? Perhaps he had intrusted Madame Gautier to the care of some unscrupulous charlatan, whose ignorance had killed her ; or had she in her unutterable misery destroyed herself ? These were questions that suggested themselves, and were debated by the legal minds who were busily investigating the case. M. and Madame Hauberdin had been induced by mere idle, morbid curiosity to visit the Morgue and look on the

body of the lady who had so mysteriously met her death. They had recognised her at once as the person who had made an appointment of rather a suspicious character at their hotel, and came forward willingly to give every information in their power respecting the case. They described all that took place at the interview between themselves and the gentleman calling himself M. Gautier. They gave a minute description of his person; but that was no proof that he was the man he asserted himself to be: besides, the verbal description of one man might apply to a thousand others. The lady herself had never acknowledged him to be her husband; and M. Hauberdin remembered that when the gentleman had uttered those emphatic words, "Madame Gautier repents her folly and has returned home with her husband," the lady had started eagerly, and seemed about to deny the assertion; but a look from him arrested the words before they

could fall from her lips. If they could see him again they would be able to recognise him and single him out from among a thousand men.

This was all the information the *maître d'hôtel* and his wife could give. It was meagre enough, but it was something. It proved that Madame Gautier had come to Paris of her own free will. All further trace, however, of M. and Madame Gautier, from the time they left the "Hôtel de l'Europe," was lost.

In vain M. Herchel mixed with railway porters, *cochers*, and people of various grades in life. Sometimes he fancied he had found a clue that might lead to something ; he followed it up vigilantly, but it ended generally in disappointment. He talked to many of the lounging multitudes who haunt the quays and lounge about the bridges of the Seine ; he always returned home no wiser than on setting out, at least as regarded the intelligence he sought. Whatever other information he gained

on less important matters was treasured up in his fertile brain, ready to be turned to account at the proper time.

One morning he wandered into the Champs Elysées, which were crowded with people eager to be amused and easily satisfied. It was holiday time, and the place was filled with attractions, such as were calculated to amuse the gay Parisians, who are by no means critical, and are always ready to laugh upon slight provocation. Here was a family of wandering musicians, creating discord enough to drive a lover of music mad; but some quaint grimace or chance jest excited the mirth of the good-humoured people, and loud bursts of hearty laughter drowned the dreary squeakings of trombone or double-bass viol. There some Tyrolese peasants, in national costume, danced their picturesque dances or sang the artless songs of their country to the delighted throng that surrounded them; while temporary restaurants sprang

up like magic beneath the pleasant shade of the trees. But not for pleasure and amusement only did the populace congregate together: there were some itinerant venders of useful, unattractive articles, and these were well supported. Here a soap-seller vaunted loudly and garrulously the wonderful properties of his merchandise, warranted to cleanse the foulest garb and to remove the stains from a lawyer's conscience, as well as from his broad-cloth—the one by an inward, the other by an outward application. The value of his wares he demonstrated openly to his auditors by seizing a gaping *gamin* and rubbing his ragged collar with the energy and vehemence of a shoe-black, till the victim escaped, leaving the triumph of his art in the vender's hand. A little farther off was an orator, offering in voluble language, for a mere trifle, a wonderful paste, the excellencies of which were, that it gave to razors so well-tempered an edge that no beard, be it stiff as

stubble, or unpliable as a harrow, could blunt it. On one side was a seller of a certain marvellous preparation, warranted to remove superfluous hair on the head or face, from one place, and make it grow on another, producing a luxurious crop on spots which nature hitherto had deserted; indeed, so vivifying was the power of the pomade, that one application alone would create an instantaneous growth of hair on the most arid scalp, by capillary attraction. Some of the most learned heads in Europe—so said the dealer—had been thatched by this marvellous compound. He had no scruple in stating that, had Samson himself applied some of this wondrous ointment, after he had been tonsured by the fair Delilah, his hair would have increased fourfold in strength and substance. He only regretted that the age in which he lived was too advanced for him to make the experiment.

M. Herchel sauntered among these wandering

Bohemians, buying their wares, chatting with one, jesting with another, apparently with motiveless ease, but in reality with well-concealed and studied purpose. He was above despising the itinerant showman and others of the same class; he knew well that the refined Punch could sometimes give a clue to other things besides the refractory Judy. Men who live by their wits walk through the world with eyes peculiar to themselves, and see many things of which the more respectable multitude take no note; the shrewd detective peered into every crevice where he thought a crumb of information might be hidden, but on this occasion brought little to light. He was fast getting angry and impatient. Deeply interested in the task he had undertaken, from strong professional pride, he was also greatly attracted towards Arnold Elmore and his family, and thus had a double incentive for the achievement of the object he had at heart. Miss Vernon he had

seen but once, but he and Mrs. Elmore had frequent interviews; in fact, his attentions to her were so great, that he had become almost her confidential adviser. She talked to him of Arnold—indeed, she was glad to talk to any one of him—so proud was she of her son. The widow's only son was evidently the mainspring of her life, and M. Herchel dreaded lest he should one day be compelled to tell her that this idolized son was implicated in her sister's murder: it would be a terrible revelation; therefore he laboured hard to find some evidence which would show that Arnold was not the real culprit.

One evening he went out as usual for a stroll through the streets of Paris. It was rather late; the gay shops were rapidly closing, but the brilliant *cafés* that here and there illuminated the Boulevards were still thronged with a merry multitude. M. Herchel, however, took his way through the more quiet streets, which were fast be-

coming deserted by all but the solitary *chiffonniers*, who pursue their lonely labour when most of the Parisians have gone to rest. He saw, far off, a gleaming light, gliding stealthily along, a few feet above the gutter; presently it stopped, and a tall dark figure seemed to stand for a few moments in conversation with an old *chiffonnière*.

Long before M. Herchel could get up to them they had parted. The old woman was still standing on the same spot, stooping down, inspecting by her light something which lay in her open palm. He tapped her on the shoulder, greeted her by name, and inquired what piece of good luck had stopped her in the middle of her work.

The woman started, and turned her bleared visage timidly towards him; the sight of his face seemed to reassure her; she grinned hideously, and said—

"Oh, it's only you, monsieur; 'What luck,' did you say? Look here!" and as she held out her open palm, her questioner saw in it a gold five-franc piece.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you have not groped in the gutter for nothing to-night."

"Folk don't throw their money in the gutter now-a-days," she answered. "I might grope long enough before I found a thing like that. No, no! monsieur, I earned it, and I think I earned it well. There's many a one in the streets now would give five francs for a safe night's rest," she chuckled, half to herself and half aloud; then she added, "I don't mind telling you how it was, for you were always a friend to the poor. A tall dark gentleman wanted to be quiet and unnoticed among our people for a time. I'm not curious; I didn't ask him why. I've sent him to my own lodging; he'll be safe enough there. He asked me heaps of questions, but the

sight of the gold has driven them all out of my head ; and, besides, I don't want to meddle with other folk's business."

"Was he anything like this?" asked M. Herchel, producing the portrait of Dr. La Belle. He felt that it was much more important for him to meet with Arnold's friend of St. Catherine's Mount than with M. Gautier ; for, however questionable his conduct might have been as a husband, the lady certainly owed her death either to Arnold himself, or to the mysterious individual he encountered on St. Catherine's Mount.

The old woman gazed at the photograph, as he held it down to the light. She shaded her eyes, then shook her head, saying—

"My sight is not so good as it was once ; but I think there is a resemblance about the beard ; *mais, monsieur,*" she added quickly, "why not see him yourself?"

"I will. I shall be glad if you will tell me

where he is; or, if you will lead me to him yourself, I will make it worth your while."

The *chiffonnière's* light was soon extinguished, and she shuffled silently along the pavement, threading her way through innumerable courts and alleys, the remnants of old Paris, which recent sweeping reforms had not then had time to demolish, till they reached the Quartier Mouffetard. There she turned down a miserable alley, closely followed by M. Herchel, who kept close to his guide; she stopped at last at a dilapidated, wretched-looking house, relighted her candle, and mounted the creaking, broken stairs. On arriving at the third floor, she stopped again, placed the light in M. Herchel's hand, laid her finger on her lip, as though to enjoin silence, pointed to a door, and then turned away, and hobbled down the stairs as fast as she could. He opened the door, and entered softly; the room was wretchedly furnished, but decent and clean. It contained an

old deal table, a worm-eaten stool, a wooden bench, and on one side a kind of tressel-bed, with a patched coverlid of many colours. On this lay stretched the figure of a man, who looked as though he had wearily thrown himself down to rest. One arm was thrown carelessly across his head. M. Herchel threw the light upon him; from what he saw of the thick dark beard, and the outline of the face, he fancied he traced a close resemblance to the photograph. He touched the sleeper lightly.

"Dr. La Belle!" he whispered, close to his ear.

"Dr. Le Diable!" grumbled the sleeper, without raising his head, and, but slightly changing his position, he seemingly composed himself to sleep again.

"Wake up!" exclaimed M. Herchel, shaking him gently, "unless your dreams of St. Catherine's Mount are too pleasant to be broken."

The sleeper was awakened then. He raised himself in the bed, looked steadily in M. Herchel's face, and inquired why he disturbed him at that hour of the night.

"I am never a welcome guest, especially to gentlemen of your calibre, monsieur," said M. Herchel, curtly; "will you be good enough to dress and follow me?"

"I am extremely obliged, but I decline the invitation," replied the other, with perfect composure.

"Come, come, Dr. La Belle; a guilty conscience needs no accuser; you must know why I am here; you will do well to go with me without any hesitation; by denying yourself you will only make matters worse."

The stranger laughed a low chuckling laugh, raised his hand, and removed the suspicious beard and whiskers. The expression of his face and the tone of his voice altered as he said—

"It must have been a good make-up, Herchel, since it took you in ; it is not often we deceive one another. Did you think I was sleeping ? *Ha, ha ! mon ami*, I was on the watch !"

"Gustave !" exclaimed M. Herchel, for once in his life greatly astounded. "How came you here ?"

"Rather how came you here ?" said Gustave. "*I* am here on my own game, and I think I shall bag my bird to-morrow."

M. Herchel explained to him how and why he came there ; his colleague laughed heartily at the way in which the old *chiffonnière* had sold him.

"Babbling Babette !" he exclaimed ; "so my golden five-franc piece could not buy her silence. It is lucky I was so disguised that she did not know me, or I should seek for my man here in the Quartier Mouffetard in vain."

He was proceeding to give his friend an account of his mission, and his chances of success ;

but M. Herchel was too much vexed and annoyed at his own want of luck to rejoice in that of another. He returned home downcast and distressed.

M. Herchel, one of the keenest and most zealous officers of the detective force, was once more sadly at fault; he was puzzled to decide what move to make next. What could he do?

Arnold, meanwhile, was treated with great kindness and consideration. He was comfortably lodged and cared for; he had a plentiful supply of books, newspapers, &c., and was often taken out for an airing. He also saw M. Herchel daily, and found him a most agreeable and intelligent man. They conversed on matters of general interest, but rarely touched on anything that bore reference to the murder.

Once M. Herchel told him that they had set all their complicated machinery to work, in order to penetrate the mystery, but had hitherto failed to

find the least clue to its solution, and inquired whether, if the matter should really come to a trial, Arnold would not like to make some preparation by engaging counsel?

"No," replied Arnold, decidedly, "I will permit no man to speak in my defence; I shall tell my own story in its plain unvarnished state; if that is not sufficient to acquit me, I must be condemned. But I have faith in God's justice. His eyes are open, when ours are closed, and I feel that He will not let me die unjustly."

The outspoken sincerity and religious hopefulness of Arnold Elmore's character impressed the detective more and more with the belief that the young Englishman was quite innocent of the serious charge that had been brought against him; and, possessed of the leading facts of the case, and having made all necessary inquiry regarding his respectability, connections, and general antecedents, with a sagacity and clear-sightedness

natural to his class, M. Herchel at once perceived that the real criminal for whom he had to search was one of no ordinary kind. He determined, therefore, to obtain permission from the heads of his department to make use of the suspected prisoner as an auxiliary in, pursuit of the real culprit. Favourably inclined towards, and much interested in, the young Englishman, he worked with so good a will, and so arranged the various facts already obtained bearing on the unlikelihood of his being the actual offender, that he succeeded in his object. How far he was right in considering Arnold indispensable to the success of the scheme he had hatched for entrapping his man, the progress of events will make plain to the reader.

One morning M. Herchel came to pay him an early visit. The officer was accompanied by a large white dog.

"I have come to take you for a long drive," he

said; "I think a few hours' change, and the fresh country air, will do you good."

"You are very kind," said Arnold, languidly; "but I am not inclined to go out: indeed, I would much rather not."

"I think you had better come."

"No, thank you: I have letters to write, and I prefer to remain within-doors to-day."

"Be advised," said M. Herchel, in a tone of peculiar meaning. "I think you had better go."

"Oh! I understand," replied Arnold, who recognised the voice of authority in M. Herchel's words. "I will attend you immediately."

He put on his coat, and they started forthwith. They drove through some fine open country and picturesque villages, for about two hours; then M. Herchel stopped, and ordered the coachman to drive up to a large handsome château. There he alighted, and inquired if the master of the house

was at home. He received an affirmative reply, and the visitors were shown into a small library, where an elderly gentleman sat writing. He rose, and bowed courteously, and inquired to what he owed the honour of their visit.

M. Herchel carelessly glanced at his face, and inquired if he had lost a dog.

"I have," replied the gentleman; "and I will gladly give a handsome reward to any one who will restore it to me. It is a rather large white dog, and answers to the name of 'Carlo.'"

"I have found a dog answering to that description. It is in my carriage, if you would like to see it," replied M. Herchel.

The gentleman followed them to the door, but on seeing the dog he shook his head. "No," the dog was not his.

"Foiled again!" exclaimed M. Herchel, as he threw himself back in the carriage, evidently much discomposed and disappointed. He was un-

usually silent as they drove homeward. When approaching Paris, he said—

“I thought I was on the right scent to-day. This dog was found wandering about the streets of Rouen, evidently deserted by its master, just about the time you left. From some private inquiries, we thought it might belong to your friend, the false Dr. La Belle, for a gentleman answering your description of him was seen with the animal, and was supposed to be its owner. I have in my pocket a list of every one, for some leagues round Paris, who keeps a dog of this kind. The gentleman we have just visited is among them, and, as I heard he had lost one, I fancied we had got our man; but at the first glance I saw that I was wrong.”

“Decidedly,” said Arnold; “he did not bear the slightest resemblance to Dr. La Belle.”

They drove on in silence. Arnold was quiet and reflective. He felt strangely calm, considering

the threatening aspect of affairs. He seemed to be in a dream, and tried to wait patiently for the waking. There were, however, moments when his spirit rose in rebellion against his fate.

“What had he done to be so cruelly tried?” as though justice was always equally distributed, good falling to the just, and evil to the evil-doer only. Sometimes he was in despair; he felt as though the stain that now rested on his brow would never be effaced; even if he were proved innocent he should thenceforth walk through the world a marked man—one who had been suspected of murder. He felt more than many men might have done in his position, for he thought not only of the present but of the future. His prospects were clouded, the ambition of his life was blighted. He had intended to enter the Church: that project must now be abandoned. There are some men who would have gloried in such trials (when they were past), and who would

have stood forth boldly and exhibited themselves as special objects of God's providence and grace. But Arnold Elmore's was a sensitive nature; he felt that a man who preached the gospel should be pure in the sight of man, as well as in the sight of God, and untainted even by a breath of slander.

Sometimes he reproached himself for want of submission to God's will; for, after all, he was but an instrument in the Divine hand, and though put to what seemed to him a vile and degraded use, he might be employed in working out some great mystery, some unknown good, as yet invisible to his mortal sense. So he reasoned with himself, and tried to feel resigned; but it was hard, very hard.

CHAPTER IV.

FRIENDLESS AND ALONE.

MRS. ELMORE remained in Paris for some time after her sister's funeral, partly at the request of M. Herchel, and partly to satisfy her own anxiety. She was desirous that the suspicious circumstances which surrounded Madame Gautier's death should be fully explained, and this, perhaps, might throw some light on her equally mysterious life.

The body of her sister was buried at Père la Chaise; and, so far as the dead was concerned, the tragedy seemed ended; before, however, the curtain fell, the last act was to be played out by the

living. The murdered woman was at rest, but her murderer was still to be discovered.

Time passed heavily and wearily with Maude Vernon. Of course she felt deeply for Mrs. Elmore's troubles, and sympathized heartily with her in her anxiety respecting her absent son. He was his mother's daily and hourly thought ; she seemed to have a presentiment that something was wrong with him ; she harassed her mind with continual apprehensions on his account, and would talk over every accident of which she had ever heard, and then imagine more, till she had convinced herself that some calamity must have happened to him, and had worked herself up into a perfect fever of excitement.

"Give me his last letter, Maude," she said, one day when she was unusually restless ; "I will look over it again. I always find some comfort in anything my dear boy's hand has touched."

"Dear auntie, I should think you knew the

letter by heart; you read it every day as conscientiously as though it were a religious exercise," said Maude, rising and fetching it from the table.

Mrs. Elmore took it and read it through, dwelling on some words as though she sought to extract some hidden meaning from them; then she read portions of the letter aloud, appealing to Maude constantly for a confirmation of her thoughts and suggestions.

"You hear what he says, Maude? 'I am undecided whither I shall next bend my steps, dear mother. Sometimes I think I shall go up to Paris for a day or two; the gaiety and brightness there may chase away the heaviness that oppresses me.' It is very likely he may be in Paris now—don't you think so, Maude? I shall ask M. Herchel, who is so kind and obliging, if he will make inquiries. If Arnold is in Paris, I'm sure he will discover him."

“Read further on,” said Maude; “you will see in the very next paragraph he changes his mind, and talks of going on to Switzerland.”

“Ah! I forgot: so he does;” and Mrs. Elmore read a little further on. “At other times I have a fancy to go on a walking tour through Switzerland; the aspect of Nature in her grand and savage mood, and the compulsory exercise and exertions I must undergo in penetrating her sublime solitudes, might rouse and invigorate my spirits, whereas the varying phases of life among the merry multitude of Paris might only tranquillize and amuse. I love those mountain peaks and giant glaciers, that lift themselves up in their whiteness and purity so much nearer to heaven than we are: they seem to exalt my thoughts with them; the very air seems to blow through the brain, and, winnowing away all mean and base matter, leave only the seeds of healthier, holier things behind. I will write again, perhaps to-morrow, and tell you

which way chance or fate has guided my footsteps.' There, Maude, what do you think now?"

"Well," replied Maude, "I should say that his inclination was decidedly for Switzerland. He does not like gaiety as a rule, nor do I believe he would seek it now. I dare say, while you are tormenting yourself by imagining all sorts of evil things, he is quietly climbing the mountains, gathering fresh health and strength at every step."

"I wish I could think so," replied Mrs. Elmore; "but I do not like the idea of his being in Switzerland; it is a dangerous country to travel through, especially on foot. You know Arnold is so fearless, so daring and persevering, he may go wandering through those unknown inaccessible regions till he is lost in the fog or snow. I almost fancy I can see him now, covered with his white frozen shroud." She shivered nervously as she spoke.

"Pray don't think of such things," said Maude,

consolingly. "How can you talk of frost and snow in this bright summer weather? It makes me cold to think of it."

"It is never summer there, up in the mountains," replied Mrs. Elmore. "Do you remember—but no, I forgot; you were not there—but I shall never forget the dreary, stony waste that surrounds St. Bernard. If my son goes to Switzerland, he is sure to pay a visit to the Hospice. You know he was ill there a few years ago, and they nursed him so tenderly, he and the Superior became such firm friends, that I feel sure Arnold will like to see him. He has often said so, and if he should——"

"Well," exclaimed Maude, interrupting her, "surely there can be no danger in such an excursion as that! Why, hundreds—I was going to say thousands—of men, and delicate women too, go over the St. Bernard pass every year, and we never hear of an accident."

“Because they go by the beaten track, and even then have guides to lead the way; but my son would not—I know him too well: he would delight in trying to find his way where the foot of man had never trodden, to scale inaccessible heights, and wander through wild, rocky chasms, taking delight in the difficulties he encountered, daring the danger in his love of the excitement. You do not believe in presentiments, Maude,” she added, lowering her voice and speaking with impressive awe. “But I have been haunted lately by the figure of a man whom I saw frozen and stiff in the Morgue at the Hospice of St. Bernard. He was found in the snow, grasping a long pole or alpenstock in his dead hand. For twenty years he has stood there rigid and upright—a frozen figure, still clothed in his frozen garments, and holding his pole as he held it tightened in his death-grasp when he sank down in the snow. He stands there as he has stood for years, and will stand for years to come,

like Death's sentinel keeping guard over the bones that lie whitening at his feet."

"It is a horrible picture," said Maude, shuddering. "Why will you think of it? What has it to do with Arnold?"

"A great deal, in my mind," replied Mrs. Elmore; "for when I shut my eyes it is no longer the dead man I see, but my boy, Arnold, takes his place, and stands there rigid, grim, and cold."

"Dear auntie, pray shake off such idle fancies. If you imagine such horrid things it will be almost as bad as creating them: the reality could not torture you more than could such unsubstantial imaginings. It is simply impossible that anything so awful can have happened to Arnold; for even at St. Bernard the snow does not lie heavy or long in summer."

"But there are blinding storms that arise suddenly in those desolate regions, having the same

effect. Besides, look here, Maude; you have not noticed this—it is ominous, I tell you—do you not see that my son's letter is dated the very day of my sister's death?"


"It is a curious coincidence indeed," exclaimed Maude, startled almost out of her self-possession by Mrs. Elmore's vehemence; "a curious coincidence, but that is all. Why should not Arnold write on that day as well as on any other? Why will you consider a mere chance occurrence as a special act of fate? Come, come; when we are all once more safe and happy at home you will smile and wonder at these sad thoughts that have troubled you abroad. No, I positively will not hear another word; and if you speak of Arnold again in that grim fashion I'll turn sulky—I'll neither listen nor answer a word. Come, let us go out for a drive, and scare away gloomy fancies: realities are bad and sad enough," she added, with a sigh.

Of course, under existing circumstances, they led a very retired life, and did not mix at all in the gaieties of Paris. They rarely left the hotel, and the only recreation they indulged in was a daily drive through the Champs Elysées, to the Bois de Boulogne, or occasionally to the Park of Vincennes.

At Maude's suggestion Mrs. Elmore dressed, ordered the carriage, and they went out for a drive. It was the most fashionable hour of the day, when all the world of Paris seems to turn out to enjoy itself. The Avenue des Champs des Elysées, the favourite promenade of the gay Parisians, presented a striking picture: the portly shopkeeper and his bejewelled wife jostling the artisan; whilst the elegant dresses of the ladies, as they sauntered to and fro among the green waving trees, like a bevy of bright butterflies, gave a charming animation to the scene. Here and there laughing girls lounged with their young

cavaliers on the capacious benches beneath the trees, chatting and swallowing ices of every imaginable compound. Here and there silent groups sat serenely smoking their cigars, watching the curling smoke as it floated in graceful columns through the clear, bright atmosphere. Then some Spanish dancing-girl, with tinkling tambourine, pretty feet, and saucy smiles, amused the pleasure-seeking throng; while the jugglers and itinerant tumblers attracted a willing and ever-changing crowd of spectators, and the immortal Punch squeaked his jokes to a delighted audience.

Mrs. Elmore's carriage rolled slowly on, Maude being evidently a pleased spectator of the busy scene. Presently there was a stoppage: they could get no further. A crowd of idlers had gathered round a poor street-singer. A hush fell upon them all, and the voice of the miserable, faded wreck of humanity poured forth a strain



of sweet melody. It was one of Béranger's pathetic songs, which act like magic on the feelings of the susceptible French people: one moment stirring them to enthusiasm, the next melting them to tears. The singer's voice rose and fell upon the ear like the clear tone of a silver bell. It had evidently once been a magnificent one, and even now the sounds seemed too full and bright to emanate from the poor, wan creature who uttered them. The body was a wreck, but the voice, Phœnix-like, sprang from the ruin, retaining much of its God-given freshness.

The woman was dressed in faded finery, which was, however, clean and decently arranged. She had carried a child in her arms, but had set it down while she sang. It was a little, fat, chubby thing, dressed in faded ribbons and odds and ends of finery, and was evidently well cared for; but the poor mother seemed to have robbed herself, as

mothers will sometime
and clothe her little

As she finished this
shower of applause
sickly smile for
of their favour.

"No," the good
you applause—
their careless good
and the evidence
her sing again.

Her wan face
applause she received
though her body
tried to sing again
out clear and strong
forth of an explosion
faltered, and failed
now. The poor
crowd for a moment

mothers will sometimes do, that she might feed and clothe her little one.

As she finished singing, she was greeted with a shower of applause ; but she looked round with a sickly smile for some more substantial expression of their favour.

“No,” the good folk laughingly said, “we give you applause—is not that sufficient?” and in their careless good-nature, reckless of her exertion and the evident poverty of her condition, bade her sing again, then they would reward her well.

Her wan face flushed with pleasure at the applause she received : it was her spirit’s food ; and though her body was famished and weary, she tried to sing again. Once more her voice rang out clear and strong : it was like the last leaping forth of an expiring flame ; then it quivered, faltered, and failed. It was not art, it was nature now. The poor singer tottered and fell, and the crowd for a moment closed round and bent over

her. The child, seeming to have a dim consciousness that something was wrong, began, at first, to whimper, then to cry aloud. The people, who a moment ago had applauded the song, looked down coolly and suspiciously upon the prostrate figure, not from any want of feeling, perhaps, but from a knowledge of the impositions that are daily practised in large cities. No man likes to be duped; and the constant exhibitions of false fits and faintings serve to choke up the current of benevolence, and stir up doubts and fears that darken its bright waters, and restrain the flow of charity.

Some cried out "She's dead!" Others said she was only shamming. One suggested a dash of cold water; but another said that the sight of the police would quickly revive her. They crowded round her, and talked and clamoured, but nobody stirred to do her any good; none attempted to help her.

Mrs. Elmore and Maude had stopped and listened with the rest ; they too had seen the poor singer's last fruitless endeavour before she tottered and fell. Maude, in her warm impulsive nature, flung open the carriage door and sprang out. She made her way rapidly through the crowd, and waved them back with a commanding gesture, saying—

“ You stifle her ! Give her air. God's air costs nothing : at least you can give her that.” She looked round quickly.

“ A franc for a cup of water ! ”

A little ragged *gamin*, such as swarm in all parts of Paris, flew off to the nearest place where it could be obtained, and in a second returned with a mug of fresh sparkling water. He was then despatched for wine.

Many were the admiring eyes that gazed wonderingly on the lovely face of the wild English girl, who, in defiance of all conventionalities, had

so unceremoniously thrown herself beside the poor singing-woman. Maude, careless and unconscious of their gaze, was bathing her face, wiping her clammy brow, and chafing her thin hands tenderly.

Mrs. Elmore's grave, stately figure followed Maude slowly. The crowd, as if magic-struck, made way for her. Mrs. Elmore looked down kindly upon Maude now, as she proceeded in her work of mercy. Some of the by-standers, after a moment's pause, shrugged their shoulders and passed on; others smiled a peculiar smile, and waited to see the end of the adventure; but there was no interference, no light word or jest uttered.

The sight of Maude, in her unconscious queenly beauty, alone would have inspired respect as well as admiration; her style of beauty, with her bright golden hair and deep blue eyes, was uncommon to them; but the total absence of coquetry in her movements was a still greater novelty.

One or two *blasé* young Frenchmen would fain have sauntered up and offered their assistance, but the still, mourning figure behind Maude stood like the grim guardian of that golden fruit. So they merely lingered round her, watching her movements, anxious to see what followed next.

Some sergents-de-ville soon arrived. To them it was no uncommon sight to see a half-starved street-singer fainting on the roads. They glanced down at the prostrate figure, spoke together aside for a moment, and then one went in search of a litter or stretcher, to carry the unconscious woman to the Sécours. As the men spoke together, or in answer to some question of a bystander, Maude caught the words "want—starvation."

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, "a woman starving, and to sing like that! Where does she live? we will take her to her home and give her some food."

"Home! madame," replied the officer; "I

don't suppose she has got a home. Such people as her live anywhere and everywhere."

"Do you know her, then?" inquired Maude, anxiously.

"Well, yes, madame," answered the sergent-de-ville, hesitatingly, "we know all these kind of people by sight. This one sings in all the most public parts of Paris. We have missed her for some weeks past: she has been sick, I suppose, and appears to have come out too soon;" and he cast an eye of pity on the senseless figure.

On inquiring further, they learned that the poor singer avoided all association with those of her own class, and that she was supposed to have seen better days. Her very name was unknown, her voice seldom heard, except when she sang or spoke to her child. She went and came by fits and starts, wandering submissively through the streets of Paris, bearing cold and hunger without complaint, asking nothing, yet receiving thank-

fully whatever trifle benevolence bestowed upon her. It was evident that even the police, whose business it is to keep a sharp eye upon all street wanderers, held the poor singer in some respect; that is to say, they treated her with as much consideration as virtuous poverty is ever likely to obtain; and that, as the world goes, is not much.

Presently the men came back with the stretcher; one stooped down to lift the child, but it screamed aloud and clung to its unconscious mother. Maude bent down, spoke to it soothingly, and took it in her arms. Strange to say, it submitted to her caress, looked wonderingly in her face, and began playing with her sparkling jet ornaments. The sergent-de-ville now stooped to raise the mother and place her on the litter. Her child's voice, or, perhaps, the strange touch of their rough hands, roused her. She turned her head, and looked up wonderingly at the shining eyes and curious faces

round her. At last her gaze rested on the sergents-de-ville. She recognised *them* at once : it was their cold, official hands that touched her. She felt them creeping about her neck, and about her feet. She shuddered, and with instinctive decency drew her well-patched shawl over her bosom, and turned away with a low moan ; she had not strength to speak, but she sought to hide her face. Maude observed the act and appreciated the motive. It was an indignity for a delicate, decent woman to be handled by strange men ; especially by those men whose chief business lies with the criminal or disorderly classes, and whose hearts grow hardened, and whose very touch is roughened by constant contact with vice and crime.

“ Stay ! ” exclaimed Maude, stretching out her hand impulsively, to arrest the movements of the officers, while she whispered earnestly to Mrs. Elmore, who at first looked grave and dubious, but at length acquiesced in her companion’s desire ;

and, with a face radiant with charitable joy, Maude stooped over the singer and said gently—

“Do you think you can rouse yourself to walk to our carriage? Lean on me: it is not far off; you shall go home with us and be taken care of until you are well again.”

The soft voice of kindness penetrated the weary one's heart, as surely as a soothing melody subdues the soul. She lifted her eyes, now dim with tears, to Maude's beaming face, which was bending with the shining light of an angel's over her. It was in truth the angel of mercy and compassion that looked out of the young girl's eyes, and for a moment transfigured her in the poor outcast's sight.

They placed her as speedily as possible in the carriage, and directed the coachman to drive slowly home. Maude took the child and hushed it to sleep in her arms. The mother, perfectly

conscious of the happy chance that had befallen her, glanced, first at Maude and then at Mrs. Elmore, gratitude gleaming in her eyes; but she was too weary in body, too bewildered in mind, to attempt to speak coherently. Presently, as the carriage rolled on, Mrs. Elmore suddenly started forward, her face flushed with excitement, looked from the window, and almost screamed aloud in her endeavour to attract the coachman's attention. At last he heard her, and pulled up to receive instructions.

"No! no!" she exclaimed with vehement excitement, "don't stop; go on! There! follow that carriage quick!"

His eye glanced in the direction she indicated, and lighted upon a handsome carriage drawn by a pair of gray horses, which were being driven at a dashing pace. He whipped his horses and galloped after them at full speed. Maude meanwhile sat in silent amazement, and as soon as

Mrs. Elmore reseated herself, inquired what it was that occasioned her agitation.

“My son!”

“Arnold! where?”

“I saw him—he is in that carriage in front of us, dressed in an officer’s uniform. You look as though you do not believe me; but we shall soon overtake them, and you will then see that I am right;” and again she looked from the window, and urged the coachman to drive faster; he lashed his horses till they seemed to fly over the ground; but in spite of his earnest endeavours they were doomed to disappointment. The carriage stopped at a fashionable millinery establishment, and two elegantly dressed ladies descended slowly from it.

“We have followed the wrong carriage,” said Mrs. Elmore, “but I know that my son is here; is safe, thank God! and I am almost satisfied.”

“I think you must have been mistaken,” observed Maude. “You may have seen some fancied

resemblance to Arnold, but it could not possibly have been himself; it is absurd to think of it;" and she could not withhold laughing outright, in spite of her sympathy for Mrs. Elmore's feelings. "The very idea of Arnold masquerading about Paris in a soldier's dress is ridiculous; he is the last person in the world who would be guilty of such a piece of folly."

"A mother's eyes are not so easily deceived," said Mrs. Elmore; "I am as confident as I am that I live that I saw my son, and by his side sat a gentleman who, I fancy, from the momentary glance I caught of him, slightly resembled M. Herchel."

In vain Maude tried to convince her she was mistaken; the belief that her son was in Paris, and that she had seen him, became a fixed idea in her mind, which all Maude's endeavours failed to shake.

"So many painful circumstances have hap-

pened lately," sighed Mrs. Elmore, "that I feel my nerves are shaken, and my mind bewildered. If I could have some communication with my son—if I could only receive a letter from him, if only to say that he is well—I should be more at ease. I have a strange presentiment, Maude, that some fearful mystery is being enacted round me. A shapeless, indefinable evil, gloomy and dark, seems to threaten me. I cannot see it, but still I feel that it is there."

"It is by no means surprising that you should feel in an excited, nervous state, the events of the last few weeks have followed each other in such quick succession; and this last trial, poor Madame Gautier's death, is so full of terrible mystery, it has cast a gloom over us all."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Elmore, "every sorrow seems to fall on me at once, and all since that fatal day. Oh, Maude, Maude!" she burst out reproachfully, "why did you send my son from

me? If anything happens to him, I shall never, never forgive you."

Maude scarcely knew what to reply. She felt acutely for Mrs. Elmore's situation—more so, indeed, than she ever ventured to express; for every word of sympathy she uttered called forth a look of sad upbraiding on her old friend's face.

"Why was that sympathy needed? Who was it that had sent her son, heart-broken, from his home?" These were the questions her mute look suggested; and Maude shrank from the full expression of her feelings.

It must be said, too, that she could never erase from her memory the last glimpse she had caught of Arnold's face; at times, in fact, it haunted her. She felt a secret uneasiness about him, which she did not care to acknowledge, even to herself; and she often found herself wondering when, and under what circumstances, they would meet again. When Mrs. Elmore's harsh speech caught her ear, "I

shall never, never forgive you," Maude took his hand tenderly, and kissed it, saying—

"Dear auntie, do not speak so; you do not mean all you say. What can have happened to your son that *I* could have prevented? Come, do not give way to imaginary fears; reality is bad enough. Arnold is, no doubt, wandering about, gathering health and strength. You will see him soon."

"Yes," said Mrs. Elmore, "as I have seen my poor sister—dressed for the grave." Maude sank back in the carriage and spoke no more.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE REQUEST.

ON reaching their hotel, the street-singer's child was consigned to the care of Mrs. Elmore's maid, while that good lady herself and Maude directed all their attention to the mother. Having conveyed her to bed, they sent for a medical man ; for they saw that she suffered from some more serious cause than fatigue or hunger. There was a hectic flush upon her cheek, an unnatural, feverish glitter in her large dark eye, which bespoke a settled disease, that needed instant care.

The physician, as soon as he arrived, verified their fears ; in addition to which, he added that

want, weariness, and intense anxiety, coupled with great excitement, threatened to end in an attack of brain-fever, which he feared his skill would be unable to avert. Having learnt how the poor woman became an inmate of Mrs. Elmore's family, he advised her immediate removal to some charitable institution, of which there are so many in Paris.

"No," said Maude, thoughtfully, "that must not be ; I should not like to send her away. It seems as if Providence has thrown her on our mercy, in order that we should do that which He has destined. I feel it would almost be a crime to desert her."

"It can hardly be called desertion," said the physician, gently ; "you have fulfilled the mission of charity already."

"I do not think so," said Maude, quickly ; "my mission of charity, as you term it, will amount to nothing if I leave her now."

"Be that as it may, I feel it is my duty to warn you that there is a grave responsibility, fraught with many difficulties and great danger, attending such an illness as this promises to be."

"Well," exclaimed Maude, energetically, and with the old obstinacy cropping up, "we must try and overcome them."

"You are young, and necessarily inexperienced, a stranger and a foreigner; and I consider it my duty to warn you against what you seem inclined to encounter. You can have no notion of this poor woman's necessities."

"I shall endeavour to discover them, and also see that they are well supplied. I thank you for your warning, monsieur," she added, graciously, "but I am fixed in my resolution; I feel that it is my duty, and I mean to do it."

"Permit me, mademoiselle," returned the physician, with gravity, in which there was a slight

asperity of tone, "to point out, that to go out into the public streets and bring home a stranger of equivocal position, uncertain worth, and doubtful fame, and surround her with attention and care, will appear something more than duty in the eyes of the world, and you may, perhaps, live to repent your charity."

"You will never persuade me to hold your opinion," said Maude, earnestly; "such sorrow and such suffering must be real, whatever else may be false and doubtful; even if all you insinuate were true, I would not leave her to starve, perhaps to die."

"My dear young lady," said the physician, "in this great and benevolent city of Paris there are hospitals and public charities for the poor and friendless; none need starve or die from destitution."

"Public charity gives cold comfort to the sick at heart," replied Maude, warmly. "Something

more than public charity is required to bind up a bruised and wounded spirit, such as that we have now before us. I feel that this poor woman has come to me as one of God's messengers, and with His grace I will entertain her with all my heart."

"Since you are animated by such holy instincts, I trust, mademoiselle, God will reward you," said the physician, catching some warmth from the young girl's glowing charity. "As a physician, it is my duty to warn you of the task you are undertaking: as a man, I thank you for the example you have set me of Christian charity. The poor are God's messengers, truly; and, though often unworthy of their calling, we must receive them for His sake. We French say that you English are a cold, passionless race; but I see that your coldness is like that of snow, which covers the earth, and keeps the seed warm from the chilling winter blasts, that it may ripen and

burst forth in usefulness and beauty when the proper season arrives."

With the common gallantry of his countrymen, the physician raised Maude's hand, with respectful homage, to his lips, saying—

"I shall not soon forget the lesson an English girl has taught a French grandsire."

He then left special directions for the treatment of his patient. As he turned to take his leave, he saw, for the first time, the child, whose long, dark locks and large weird-like eyes gave it the appearance of elfin beauty.

"There is, at least, one difficulty in your way," he said, pointing to the child.

"I do not see it," replied Maude. "To save the mother and neglect her child would only be doing half the work. Whatever may have been the sins of the parent, the child is guiltless; that, I think, you will admit. At any rate, I do not consider it an obstacle, but another claim on my

humanity, which Providence has given me a chance of recognising. Look at its large, imploring eyes; do they not seem to say, 'Have mercy on me'? God often speaks to the ear by the mouths of babes and sucklings; and why should He not appeal through their eyes to our heart?"

The doctor looked at Maude with astonishment, and said, half aloud—

"How eccentric these English are! But I see it does not do to thwart them."

Maude made all necessary arrangements for the poor invalid's comfort. With her own hands she smoothed the pillow and administered the cooling draught. She placed in her room pots of mignonne, geraniums, and heliotrope, and made it look as fresh, pleasant, and cheerful as a woman alone can. She watched every turn and movement of her patient, who silently observed her kind benefactor as she quietly flitted about the room, now and then stooping over her to see whether

she was comfortable or required anything. Maude spoke to her in such soft and tender tones that they seemed to her like an angel's whisper. The poor outcast raised her eyes in tearful gratitude, and stretched out her thin, emaciated hand. Maude's warm clasp, though gentle as the night-dew, closed over it, and seemed to send a thrill through the poor girl's frame. She spoke not—her heart was too full to speak; she sobbed softly at first, then louder by degrees; at last her heart overflowed in a burst of tears, so wild, so unearthly, that Maude grew slightly alarmed; then came a flood of incoherent expressions of gratitude in provincial French. Maude endeavoured to stem the torrent of her thanks, and still her agitated nerves.

“Not another word of thanks,” she whispered, laying her hand softly on her brow; “I will not hear you. If you excite yourself so much you will undo all the kind doctor is doing for you.

Come, if you will sob so, I must leave you until you are calm. Sleep will do you more good than anything else."

As Maude was leaving the room, taking with her the little child, the poor patient's eye followed her with a wistful look, and the single word "Raoul" fell from her lips.

Immediately on hearing its name pronounced, the child broke from the hand of Maude, scrambled to its mother's bed, and perched itself by her pillow. The poor invalid smiled a wan, painful smile, put out her hand, and caught hold of her offspring, and, having made sure that she held her treasure fast, turned her head towards it, and tried to sleep.


Maude started as the word "Raoul" fell from the sick woman's lips, and the blood rushed throbbing to her temples. It seemed strange to hear that name uttered by those parched, feverish lips. She thought there was but one Raoul in

the world, and that that was her beloved ; and she felt that his name should be as uncommon as his perfection, and identified only with himself. She, for a second, almost disliked the boy for bearing the name of the man she loved. However, she crept silently from the room, leaving mother and child together.

On rejoining Mrs. Elmore, Maude found that lady busily engaged in reading a letter.

“Here are two letters,” she said, glancing up as Maude entered: “one for you, and this, from M. Gautier, for me ; but as it chiefly concerns your business, Maude, perhaps you would like to read it yourself.”

Maude knew well enough what was the business alluded to : she knew the letter was in answer to one Mrs. Elmore had written to Madame Gautier, making what Maude deemed unnecessary inquiries concerning M. St. Pierre and his family. This was the first time for many days that any reference



had been made to him. Her face flushed as she received the letter; but before she read a line she looked in Mrs. Elmore's face, and said—

“Mind, if he says one word that is unfavourable to M. St. Pierre, I shall spurn it as untrue. I will not entertain even an insinuation against him.”

“Unfortunately, Maude, he speaks too favourably of him. I put no faith in what he writes,” said Mrs. Elmore; “but read and judge for yourself.”

The letter ran thus—

“MADAME,—As my wife is absent from home, and probably will not return for some weeks, I have taken the liberty to reply to your letter, as the information you seek appears to be urgent. I shall answer your inquiry with as much brevity as the subject will admit. Both Madame Gautier and myself have enjoyed a long and agreeable acquaintance, I may say friendship, with M. St.

Pierre ; his family is one of the oldest in this part of the country, and of unexceptionable respectability. There is not a blot on their escutcheon, except that of poverty, which in your high-souled land I have heard is no blot at all. Poverty was M. St. Pierre's inheritance ; but he has made, by his perseverance and talent, a sufficient independence. As I am ignorant of the object of your inquiry, I can but answer in a general way. I do not know whether my friend St. Pierre is seeking a public appointment or matrimonial alliance ; but in either case I heartily wish him success ; for, in my humble opinion, he would do honour to both. I assure you, I feel as much interest in his well-being as I do in my own. If my dear Constance were here, I am sure she would subscribe to all I have said ; or rather, she would have expressed, in more graceful and flattering words, what I have so coldly and formally written.

"Accept, Madame, the respectful homage and assurance, of yours, &c.,

"R. GAUTIER."

"A very proper and nice letter," said Maude, returning it to Mrs. Elmore; "I should think the writer of it must be a most agreeable man. You must be very obstinate if you are not satisfied now; you see how well M. Gautier, who is evidently an old friend, speaks of M. St. Pierre."

"I have no respect for, nor confidence in, M. Gautier's word," replied Mrs. Elmore.

"You carry your prejudice too far," said Maude, reproachfully. "If M. Gautier had written anything against M. St. Pierre, you would have placed unbounded faith in every word he said."

"There are some men," continued Mrs. Elmore, without heeding her interruption, "whose praise is condemnation, and whose esteem is censure. Even truth, from some men's lips, seems tainted

and unhallowed. I must confess, right or wrong, this letter disgusts and troubles me. I cannot bear to see my unfortunate sister's name traced by such a flippant, careless hand, and she, poor thing! murdered, mouldering in her grave," she added, bitterly.

"I can quite understand your feeling," said Maude, eagerly; "but you ought not to blame M. Gautier for that. He evidently is ignorant of her death; he tells you she is away from home; and see, his letter was written many days ago," she added, pointing to the date, "and sent to your house in London. By this time the ill-news must have reached him, and at this very moment he may be as much stricken, and even more overwhelmed with grief than yourself."

"Ah, Maude, Maude," said Mrs. Elmore, sadly, "you are resolved to think well of M. Gautier because he praises the man you say you love. But look at this post-mark," she added, quickly;

"the letter is dated from Beauvais, and posted at Paris."

"My dear Mrs. Elmore," replied Maude, "there is nothing in that; he may have given his letter to a friend to post, who had forgotten it for a time, and afterwards posted it in Paris. Such slips of memory often happen. You may remember, Arnold once carried a letter of mine which I had given him to post in his pocket, and forgot it until the envelope was worn out; and," she added, laughing, "I have never trusted him with a letter since."

Maude still held unopened M. St. Pierre's letter in her hand. It was sealed with black wax, and was in deep mourning. She took the opportunity of Mrs. Elmore sitting down to her writing-desk to escape from the room to read it; she did not choose that any eye should witness her delight in perusing the lines his hand had written. The letter contained an account of his mother's death.

It was written with brief sadness ; a spirit of melancholy overshadowed even the soft love-light he endeavoured to pour upon its pages.

“As soon as the last sad rites are over,” he wrote, “I shall speedily arrange all matters of business and hasten to rejoin my sweet Maude in England. The light that has shed its tender beams upon me during my past life, letting its soft rays fall lightly even upon my follies, is now quenched for ever ; and were it not for the light of your sweet love, the brightness of which beckons me onward, my future would be dark indeed. Forgive me, dearest, if I do not write in such gay spirits as your chosen one should ; but I confess my heart is heavy ; to a man, even at my age, a mother’s death is a most bitter loss.”

There was a postscript added, which ran thus—
“My movements are so uncertain, dearest, that perhaps you had better not write until you hear from me again. This shall be soon.”

Maude read his letter over and over again. Every line seemed to reveal to her the nobleness of his nature and the tenderness of his heart. She seemed to drink in every word, as though it was her soul's sustenance. What slight matter is food for love, and on what a frail foundation it can build its ethereal paradise—a paradise too often dispelled by the breath of truth or the flash of reason's light!

She looked forward with a sickening longing to the time when he would return to claim her, and they should never part more. Since they had parted the days seemed long and dreary, the whole aspect of life to have changed; its bright hues and gay colours were all absorbed in him; all was gloom and vacuity where he was not. Matters too had changed very much between her and Mrs. Elmore; there was no use denying or attempting to conceal it, their intercourse was not the same as it had been a month before.

True there was the same daily interchange of courtesies and attentions, the duty of affection was fulfilled to the letter, but the spirit was cold and dead. Mrs. Elmore could not forget that her son had been rejected, and that he was in consequence, as she believed, wandering abroad with a wounded and broken spirit. To do her justice, she intended to regard Maude with unchanged affection ; but unconsciously, indeed unwittingly, her manner was full of resentment, and her sweetest words had a bitter flavour ; there was a desire to be just, but she had no power to control her feelings ; and poor Maude, being made to feel that she had wounded her best and kindest friend by not making a sacrifice of herself, was too glad to escape as much as possible from her society.

Now that the poor street-singer had fallen into her hands, it gave her a reasonable excuse of absence from Mrs. Elmore. Every minute, therefore,

that she was not in decency compelled to spend with Mrs. Elmore she devoted to the sick woman and her child. As she sat with them, with Raoul's letter in her hand, which she had read for the twentieth time, thinking over the past and present, and speculating on the future, one of the servants of the hotel entered to say that M. Herchel desired to speak with her, if she would kindly permit him.

"With me!" said Maude, somewhat surprised; "there must be some mistake. It is Mrs. Elmore's business in which he is engaged; it must be her whom he wishes to see."

The servant explained that there could be no mistake; as M. Herchel first asked to see Mrs. Elmore, and had been with that lady a quarter of an hour or more; and it was in Mrs. Elmore's presence M. Herchel gave his message, and with her permission the servant brought it.

Possessed of this information, Maude felt that

she ought to attend to M. Herchel's request; and yet she had a strong disinclination to accede to it. "What could he possibly want with her?" she wondered. "I do not know why I should object to see him, or why this strong repugnance should possess me," she said, talking to herself; "but I have an instinctive horror of M. Herchel, that I can hardly account for. I always associate him with Madame Gautier. There seems to be an odour of death and suspicion around him. I cannot help thinking that his visit now is a precursor of something unpleasant; however, I will go and see him. Why should I be unnerved? It is cowardly to avoid looking danger in the face when it is necessary to meet it."

With this feeling Maude descended to the drawing-room. She found Mrs. Elmore sitting thoughtfully on a sofa; standing opposite to her was M. Herchel, looking scrutinizingly at a letter which Maude, at a glance, saw was that which

Mrs. Elmore had, a few hours before, received from M. Gautier.

M. Herchel bowed respectfully to Maude, and placed a chair for her near Mrs. Elmore. Maude declined the proffered seat, and remained standing.

"I have to offer you ten thousand apologies, mademoiselle, for disturbing you," he said, "but I should not have ventured on such a step had it not been necessary. I have the permission of Madame to speak to you."

"Pray, make no apology, monsieur; I am ready to hear whatever you have to say to me," said Maude, "though I am really at a loss to know what your business can be with me."

"I can scarcely venture to call it business, mademoiselle," replied M. Herchel, with great respect: "I have merely a request to make; and I trust that your courtesy will grant what I ask."

Maude bowed, and signed to M. Herchel to continue.

M. Herchel then said, in rather an inquisitorial tone, "You have, I believe, received a letter this morning from a gentleman named St. Pierre."

"And pray, monsieur, how can that matter concern you?" inquired Maude, her face flushing indignantly.

"Pray pardon me, mademoiselle, if my question has offended you," answered M. Herchel, "but I thought that its seeming impertinence would have assured you I had good reason for venturing to ask it."

"No reason, monsieur, can excuse impertinence," replied Maude, haughtily. "But to make this interview as brief as possible, I admit I *have* received a letter this morning from a gentleman bearing the name you have mentioned."

"May I request you to allow me to see that letter?" asked M. Herchel, coolly.

“ You may request, monsieur, but I have the power, at least, to refuse you,” returned Maude, an angry flush overspreading her face. “ I never heard so much assurance—request to see a lady’s private correspondence! I wonder what your next demand will be ?”

“ Mine was a *request*, mademoiselle, not a *demand*,” returned M. Herchel, gravely ; “ and if you knew how much it concerned your friend Madame Elmore, I am sure you would comply for her sake.”

“ For my friend I would do a great deal ; but I will not do anything my conscience disapproves. I consider that a letter sent from one individual to another is mutually the property of both the person corresponded with and the correspondent himself, or herself, as the case may be, and therefore should be held in strict confidence and respect. It is dishonourable to expose it to strangers. My correspondence with M. St. Pierre strictly concerns

ourselves, and no other person. So, monsieur, you have your answer," replied Maude, turning her eyes slowly and resting them on Mrs. Elmore's face. After a moment's pause, she added, "However, monsieur, I should like to know in what way your inspection of my private correspondence can benefit my friend?"

Before M. Herchel could make a reply Mrs. Elmore approached Maude, and said kindly to her—

"M. Herchel means no offence, my dear child; you misunderstand him. He merely wishes to see the handwriting, not the contents of your letter. He is anxiously investigating the tragical affair of my poor sister, and on that account I thought it right to comply with his request to see M. Gautier's letter to me. I had no hesitation whatever in showing it to him, and I did not consider it necessary to demand the why or the wherefore."

"What! not when the request is irrelevant to the matter?" asked Maude, haughtily.

"It is reasonable, mademoiselle," interposed M. Herchel, "for *you* not to know what may be irrelevant and what may not. Great events often spring from trivial causes. A momentous scheme of villany is sometimes frustrated by a single word heedlessly uttered or written. However, since you refuse to accede to my request, I will prefer it elsewhere, when you perhaps will explain what important *private* reason prevents you from assisting to investigate the tragical affair of the death of Madame's sister."

Although M. Herchel spoke with the most perfect courtesy, Maude did not like his tone nor the expression of his face, and she answered quickly—

"No, monsieur, I have no private reason for my refusal that I cannot freely express to you. In my own country we have a wholesome horror

of espionage into the affairs of private life, and I am indignant that I am exposed to it here. I repeat, monsieur, I do not see what assistance the sight of M. St. Pierre's handwriting can be to you. However, monsieur, your request is granted. There is what you ask. May it lead you to the success you seek."

As she spoke she cast the envelope which had contained M. St. Pierre's letter indignantly on the ground.

"Amen!" said M. Herchel. He stooped and picked up the envelope, and almost immediately afterwards took his departure. Maude, amazed and confounded at what had occurred, appealed to Mrs. Elmore to explain the meaning of it.

"I do not know anything whatever about his motives for asking to see our correspondence, Maude," she answered. "I only know he asked me some most extraordinary questions about you."

"About me!" exclaimed Maude, indignantly. "I hope you answered none of his impertinent inquiries?"

"I don't know how it is," replied Mrs. Elmore, "but I feel compelled to answer to everything he asks me; he has a way of eliciting information whether one is willing to give it or not. He inquired about your property—how it was settled—whether you were your own mistress or not; and wanted to know all about—about your engagement, Maude; and of course I told him."

Maude became extremely angry. She had never felt so indignant before. Not only her engagement to M. St. Pierre, but her position and her private affairs, which should, at least, have been kept sacred, had been canvassed and commented upon by a stranger; and Mrs. Elmore had been the instrument in the matter. She did not utter a single word of reproach; she was too angry, and felt that in

her wrath she might say something which she would afterwards regret. She left the room with a full heart, returned to the bed of the poor invalid, hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHARMING WIDOW.

ON the evening of the same day that M. Herchel had his somewhat unpleasant interview with Mrs. Elmore and Maude Vernon, the detective might have been seen mingling freely with the crowds of idlers and pleasure-seekers who sauntered about the Champs Elysées. He had evidently some great business on hand, and seemed to be flushed with expectation ; he threaded his way among the crowd with a slow, measured step, every now and then darting quick, penetrating glances around him. Gay laughing ladies, pretty grisettes, and their attendant swains, were all in turn the objects

of his momentary scrutiny. At length his eye lighted upon a gentleman who sat in a shady, out-of-the-way nook, sipping his *café*. He held a paper in his hand, which he seemed to be reading attentively ; so absorbed was he in its contents that he never even raised his eyes to glance upon the animated scene before him. Towards this gentleman M. Herchel quietly made his way. He stood some few paces off, and gazed at him for a few minutes with severe scrutiny. All the tables in the vicinity were engaged ; but presently he was enabled to sit down at the one which the stranger occupied, and in a few minutes was sipping some coffee, and puffing away at a cigar with the zest of an accomplished smoker. The stranger continued reading. After a short time, however, he looked up, and, discovering that he had a companion at his table, his naturally stern features relaxed into a bland smile as he offered him the paper, saying—

"*Le Moniteur* can scarcely be so amusing to you, monsieur, as it has been to me ; it is the first French paper I have seen for some months."

M. Herchel, with a courteous gesture, received the paper, saying—

"I presume, then, monsieur, you have been travelling ?"

"Yes ; I have been travelling in Germany and Switzerland, and only arrived in Paris last night. I was anxious, as you may guess, to see the latest Parisian news."

"There's very little news stirring at present," said M. Herchel, running his eye down the columns of the paper.

"I noticed a brief allusion to some sad and mysterious tragedy, which seems to have been committed in a railway train," said the stranger.

"Oh, yes," replied M. Herchel, "it was committed, so report says, by a young Englishman."

"An Englishman was it ?"

"Yes—at least it is a young Englishman who is suspected. It would be premature, of course, to say that he did it until he has been tried, but circumstances seem to be very strong against him. These matters are always kept very close by the police; it is rumoured, however, that he has made some extraordinary statement accusing another person of the crime; but the person whom he accuses seems to have no existence, for he cannot be found."

"Just like those bungling English," replied the stranger; "they are eccentric even in crime."

After a few further remarks the subject dropped, and they chatted carelessly on other matters. The stranger called for a cigar.

"Pray oblige me by trying one of mine," said M. Herchel, politely offering his well-filled cigar-case, "they are from Russia, and that is a sufficient guarantee for their good quality. I think

there are no cigars or perfumes equal to those we get from Russia."

The offered courtesy was accepted with a profusion of thanks. The fusee-box was declined.

"If you will permit me," said the stranger, "I will take a light from your cigar; I prefer it."

The two men stood opposite one another, their faces approached, and the process of lighting the cigar commenced. The stranger's eye-lids dropped as he watched the slow ignition. Puff, puff, the fragrant smoke curled beneath their nostrils, and floated away in light, graceful clouds, which did not, however, for a moment obscure M. Herchel's vision. His keen eyes were fixed upon the stranger's face, as though he were taking a mental photograph of every feature.

They sat some time smoking and chatting in a desultory manner, watching the current of life as it flowed onwards with its buoyant burthen of

light hearts and laughing faces. Occasionally their discourse was flavoured with a pungent jest, or biting satire, upon things and people, or the events and fashions of the day.

Near to where they sat, and partially screened by the green leafy foliage, were two ladies; the one young and elegantly dressed, with sparkling eyes and vivacious countenance, full of varying expressions; the other, a staid, elderly woman, attired with sober simplicity suited to her years. M. Herchel observed the stranger cast more than one furtive glance upon these two solitary ladies. Presently, after a brief pause, during which they had been puffing away in dreamy silence, he said—

“That is the most attractive face I have seen to-day, but its expression puzzles me; I don’t know whether it means to be grave or gay.”

M. Herchel cast a seemingly careless glance in the direction indicated, and answered—

“Ah! you are by no means singular in your opinion. That lady is Madame Radowski. She is the widow of a Russian general, and is considered the most charming, as she is decidedly the richest, woman in Paris. She is the admiration of all.”

“I should not be surprised at any amount of admiration she might excite,” answered his companion. “She is still young, and a widow, you say. I wonder she is allowed to remain a widow.”

“Do you?” replied M. Herchel. “I confess I should wonder more if she were induced to marry; young, rich, and handsome, why should she?”

“For those very reasons, because she is young, rich, and handsome; so much wealth and beauty need a careful guardian.”

“She does not seem to think so; besides, she might have some difficulty in finding a careful guardian,” replied M. Herchel. “I believe she has a whole crowd of admirers, young and old, grave and gay; but she gives encouragement to

none. She is like the sun, that shines on all alike."

Here the objects of their attention rose up and sauntered slowly away, passing close by the spot where they were seated; and the eyes, and apparently the thoughts, of M. Herchel and his acquaintance were attracted by fresh objects.

"Strange," observed M. Herchel, "how much alone a man may be even in such a crowded, brilliant scene as this."

"Alone: yes," replied his companion; "but a man need never be lonely while the Palais Royal is in existence."

"You play, then?" said M. Herchel, quickly.

"Generally I content myself by looking on, but I can play a little; and I occasionally indulge in a game at billiards, merely to pass away an hour when the time hangs heavy."

"That is exactly my case," said M. Herchel. "I know how to handle a cue, but I seldom play."

"Well," observed his companion, "as we neither of us appear to have much business on hand, I don't think we can do better than adjourn to the Palais Royal now. I challenge you to a game; do you agree?"

"With all my heart: I shall be glad of a little practice. But I think we had better go to the 'Café du Grand Balcon:' it is by far the best place."

They both arose and sauntered slowly towards the "Café du Grand Balcon," situated at the back of the Opéra Comique. At a sudden turn in the road they again encountered the beautiful widow. M. Herchel shot a quick, lightning glance towards her; it would be difficult to say whether she observed him or not, but she cast down her eyes with nunlike gravity, and passed on.

Arrived at their destination, they entered, and, ascending a handsome staircase, found themselves on the first landing, where a number of well-dressed livery servants were in attendance, who

received their hats and canes, and then threw open the wide folding-doors. They stepped forward, and the doors closed noiselessly behind them. The room into which they entered was well filled, though not crowded. A few gaily-dressed ladies walked slowly up and down the room, some of them talking earnestly together in low whispering voices. Military men, with their soldier-like bearing and bright uniforms, and numerous civilians, some grave, some gay, many of them attired in sombre and thread-bare suits—here and there one that had grown gray and was bent with the weight of years, alongside another just merged into manhood, with the fresh down upon his lip and the bloom of youth upon his face—all were lounging about, or engaged in their favourite pastime. Of the women, some were fair and young, others old and wrinkled; most of these flaunting in feathers and laces, though the shadow of the grave lay plainly upon them.

A crowd was gathered round a table, intent upon the game that was proceeding, watching, eager, silent, and breathless, till the measured tones of the croupier's voice announced the winning colour, "rouge" or "noir." Then a quivering sigh, a long-drawn breath, or a muttered oath broke the silence. After a moment's pause, the croupier's voice again might be heard, steady and strong as the voice of doom; and so the monotonous scene continued—monotonous in its sights and sounds of ruin and despair.

M. Herchel and his companion stood for some moments silent spectators of the scene. M. Herchel declined his new acquaintance's invitation to join the rouge-et-noir table. He preferred, he said, a game that depended more on skill than chance. They therefore made their way slowly to the farther end of the room, and, drawing aside a heavy curtain, discovered a double baize-covered door, through which they passed, and found them-

selves in the billiard-room, which was but scantily occupied. There was, indeed, only one set of players; the rest were lounging about smoking or looking on.

Having chosen their table, chance decided that the stranger should have first play. He drew off his gloves, arranged the balls, and took the cue, which he handled with the skill of a master. He struck once, and sent the ball home. M. Herchel, lynx-eyed, was by his side, watching his movements more intently, it seemed, than the occasion demanded. The stranger raised the cue again and cautiously took aim, first running his eye over the board, calculating to a nicety where his stroke would fall. Just as he was about to strike he felt his hand suddenly arrested, the cue dropped from it, a muttered "*Sacre !*" fell from his lips, and a glance of fire shot from his eye. He turned his head sharply, and discovered that it was his companion who had seized his hand in

that unceremonious fashion. Before he had time to demand the cause or resent the act, a bland smile overspread M. Herchel's face, and he dropped the hand he had so unceremoniously seized, but which he had narrowly inspected, saying, in an apologetic tone—

“Pray pardon me, monsieur, but I am an ardent admirer of antique gems. The one on your finger attracted my attention. It is one of the finest I have ever seen.”

The few loungers who had witnessed so strange a proceeding gathered round them, thinking naturally that a fracas was about to ensue; but they were disappointed, as neither of the gentlemen were the least inclined to attract public attention; indeed, they would both have done their best to avoid it. Whatever momentary annoyance the stranger might have felt, it disappeared when his glance fell on M. Herchel's cool, impassive face, which expressed nothing but a connoisseur's

admiration of the gem he had so unceremoniously taken the liberty of inspecting. The stranger drew off the ring and handed it to M. Herchel, that he might inspect it more closely.

"Yes," said he, smiling, "the gem is a fine one; but *pardieu*, monsieur, you chose an odd way and an odd time to express your admiration. You spoilt my best stroke."

"*Mille pardons*," replied M. Herchel, with a polite bow; "but you are so fine a player you will have no difficulty in repeating it."

He picked up the cue as he spoke and handed it to his companion, who forthwith proceeded with the game, and won. They played another game, and again M. Herchel lost. At the third game he was the victor. He then withdrew from the table, saying—

"It is no small honour to win when so capital a player as yourself is my adversary. I am afraid I must rest content for to-day, as I have an

appointment at six, and it is very near that hour now."

"Should you feel inclined for a little more practice," said the stranger, courteously, "tomorrow, at this hour, I shall be here, when I shall be happy to join you."

The stranger lingered some time after M. Herchel had departed, but he played no more. He lounged from table to table, watching other players. At the conclusion of one of the games he made a few remarks upon the play he had witnessed, then lighted his cigar and sauntered from the room. As he reached the street and walked slowly and thoughtfully away, a lady, elegantly dressed, with her veil closely drawn, hurried swiftly past him. She had not proceeded far in advance of him when she dropped her handkerchief, which, fine as a web of gossamer, was almost wafted to his feet. He picked it up, and hastened after the fair owner, anxious to

restore it to her. He glanced at the initials as he went along. The letters "A. R." were fancifully embroidered on it, and were surmounted by a coat-of-arms. A sudden thought struck him. He looked after the lady; she was about the same height and had the same graceful appearance as Madame Radowski. Could it possibly be her? No, surely not; what could she be doing at that part of the town, and alone too? He glanced after the rapidly-disappearing figure; for his momentary hesitation had enabled her to get some distance ahead of him. From her great haste he judged that she was desirous of avoiding observation. He hastened after her, and as he got nearer to her he fancied he recognised her dress.

A smile of much meaning appeared on his countenance. "So," he thought, and the smile deepened almost to a sneer, "the young, rich, and beautiful widow is evidently out upon some

private expedition ;” and, as though to frustrate her design, he quickened his steps and followed her. He had almost reached her ; a few steps more would bring him to her side, when suddenly her foot slipped, she reeled, and would have fallen, had he not sprung forward and received her in his arms. She was so startled and overcome by the suddenness of the occurrence that for a second she could not collect herself sufficiently to thank him for his prompt assistance. However, when she at length raised her face to his and thanked him, there was a rosy blush upon her cheeks, a winning sweetness in her tone, and so much grace and dignity in her manner, that he was sorry when she had ceased speaking. The lady now attempted to proceed on her way, but a cry, almost a scream, escaped her as she did so ; in a second he was again at her side, his arm supporting her, for without his assistance she would inevitably have fallen to the ground.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, drooping her head as though she suffered, "I fear I have sprained my ankle: I am in great pain; I cannot walk. What shall I do?" and as she looked up at the stranger, her eyes swam with tears.

He saw that she was greatly distressed, as much at finding herself in such an awkward position with a strange gentleman as by the pain she was suffering, and he was lavish in his offers of assistance. It seemed as though fate was always propitious to his wishes. An hour ago he had seen and been struck by the lady's appearance, and an introduction to her seemed to be the most unlikely thing that could happen; now chance or fate had thrown her on his protection.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Shall I help you to the nearest hotel, and then summon your servants? or will you permit me——?"

Before he could finish his sentence a *fiacre* was seen slowly approaching. It appeared to be

empty, for the driver was lolling in his seat, and the horse was proceeding very leisurely.

"Oh, monsieur," exclaimed Madame Radowski, quickly, "pray see if that *fiacre* is occupied: if it is not, be good enough to engage it for me."

Seeing that he hesitated, she added, with a charming smile—

"You need not be afraid to leave me: I can stand for a moment; my foot only hurts me when I move."

He bowed and left her, but returned in a moment with the vehicle, and assisted her into it.

"I shall hardly feel satisfied with myself," said the stranger, "unless I see you in safety under your own roof. Will you permit me to be your escort home?"

"You are very kind, monsieur," she answered, graciously. "I should be ungrateful indeed to refuse you."

Delighted to receive this permission, he gave the driver her instructions, and sprang in after her. Away they rattled, and in a very short space of time stopped at one of the most elegant houses in Paris, the appearance of which evidently corroborated the information the stranger had received concerning Madame Radowski's wealth, &c.

Having confided her, somewhat unwillingly, it must be admitted, to the care of her servants, who received their mistress with respectful and anxious affection, the stranger was about to leave. Before he did so, however, he received her permission to call and inquire for her in the morning. Much elated with the adventure he had had, the stranger now bent his steps homeward.

The following morning he rose betimes, took extra pains with his toilet, and, at the earliest hour custom would admit, went to pay his visit to the beautiful widow. He was greatly disappointed to find that she was not visible; but, in answer to

his inquiries, he was informed that she had received no injury beyond a slightly sprained ankle. He left his card, "M. Michel, Rue St. Honoré, 13," and went away chagrined that he had not the opportunity of seeing her again. He had resolved to persevere till he had established an acquaintance with her, and was annoyed at the rebuff he had received; but he soon regained his equanimity, and, within two hours of his return home, was agreeably surprised on receiving a delicately-perfumed note, informing him that Madame Radowski would be at home on the following evening, and would be much pleased to receive him. He immediately despatched a rapturous acceptance of her invitation, at the same time warmly expressing his sense of the distinguished honour she had conferred upon him.

In the afternoon he rambled out along the crowded boulevard, through the Champs Elysées, and on to the Bois de Boulogne. He was inclined

to enjoy a solitary stroll through its sylvan scenes. His brain was oppressed with the weight of conflicting thoughts and feelings, and he felt that it would be a luxury to be alone, to have time to think and meditate. In spite of the crowds of people in carriages and on foot that throng to that beautiful and popular resort, there are some quiet, shady nooks where lovers of solitude may enjoy themselves to their hearts' content.

He had not proceeded far on his way when he felt a slight tap upon his shoulder. He started and turned round, and saw that it was his new acquaintance M. Herchel. He felt slightly ruffled at the unexpected *rencontre*, for, in addition to his inclination to indulge in a solitary ramble, he wished to reflect upon his adventure with Madame Radowski. He did not wish to make M. Herchel his confidant in that matter; although, considering the events of the previous day, it might,

perhaps, be expected that he would have done so. For these reasons he stopped in his walk, and chatted for awhile in the spot where they had met.

"I won't keep you standing here," said M. Herchel, with his usual suavity of manner; "which way are you going?"

"Well," his new acquaintance answered, smiling, "I feel somewhat of a hermit this morning; I am tired of the crowded city, and am wandering away from the haunts of men, to indulge in a little seclusion, and to gather together my scattered thoughts in the Bois de Boulogne."

"A charming place for a ramble; if you will allow me, I will accompany you," said M. Herchel, as though he were determined not to be shaken off. M. Michel, to avoid being rude, was, to a certain extent, compelled to submit to his companionship. Arm-in-arm, therefore, they wandered on, chatting upon a variety of matters, and making

remarks on passing objects, till they reached the Bois de Boulogne, that triumph of art and nature combined—a tribute to the people of France from Napoleon III., and a lasting memorial of the taste, spirit, and liberality of their ruler.

They strolled about beneath the shadow of the trees, and among the tall dark pines, till they reached a most beautiful and secluded spot, on the borders of one of those miniature lakes with which the Bois is ornamented. Here, tempted by the charming panoramic view spread out before them, they threw themselves on the smooth green grass, to rest themselves for a short time. M. Michel raised himself up on his elbow, and called his companion's attention to the flight of a poor white pigeon, which was being pursued by a hawk. They wheeled round and round in circles above their heads—the tame pigeon and the fierce wild hawk. M. Michel got excited in

the chase, not from pity for the pursued, but eager for the success of the pursuer ; he feared the prey might escape it. He shaded his eyes from the sun, that he might more easily follow and distinguish the movements of the two birds. Presently the pigeon grew exhausted ; its wings fluttered feebly, as though it were falling, and the hawk swooped down upon it with the swiftness of lightning. The birds were directly above M. Michel's head, and the warm blood of the slaughtered pigeon dropped in heavy gout upon his throat. With a hasty exclamation he put up his hand, and drew it away smeared with blood.

M. Herchel, bursting into a hearty fit of laughter, exclaimed, "If you were in England they would call this occurrence a bad omen."

"It is decidedly disagreeable," replied M. Michel," taking out his pocket-handkerchief and wiping his throat. "Faugh !" he added, looking

at the red stain on the white cambric, "I hate the sight of blood, it makes me shudder."

Instead of replacing the handkerchief in his pocket, he threw it on the ground. M. Herchel politely picked it up and presented it to its owner; as he did so he threw an imperceptible glance on the monogram worked in the corner, which certainly did not serve for the name of Michel.

"As to its being a bad omen," continued M. Michel, "I have no faith in such absurdities."

"Nor I either," replied M. Herchel; "but there is a curious story told in connection with this strange belief."

"Indeed!" said M. Michel. "What is it?"

"You shall hear it. A sculptor—I forget his name—was carrying home a bust of that unfortunate monarch Charles I., and, becoming tired, he stopped to rest himself by the roadside; a pigeon at the time flew over his head, and was struck down by a hawk; the blood of the bird fell upon

the neck of the monarch's bust. The sculptor thought it ominous ; and so it proved. The king was beheaded. Hence they say in England, that he who is sprinkled with pigeons' blood will never die a natural death."

"They say that in England, do they?" returned M. Michel, smiling blandly ; "but the sayings of England are not believed in France ; if they were, something more precious than pigeons' blood would flow."

CHAPTER VII.

A CONTRETEMPS.

GREAT crimes will stir the heart of a nation to its innermost core, especially when they are surrounded by a dark and, what seems to be, an impenetrable mystery. The murder of Madame Gautier—for murder it was, of the most cowardly and cruel description—caused a profound sensation of horror throughout France. The circumstances attending it were so novel and bewildering, that they created a general interest in the fate of Arnold Elmore, and excited multitudes were looking eagerly forward to the day of trial,

which was already fixed upon, and was to take place speedily. Many speculations were afloat, and strange rumours were circulated, concerning the young Englishman. Some believed him guilty, and did not hesitate to pronounce his simple story a gross fabrication, which none but a blundering Briton would have ventured to put forth. It was so easy, they argued, for a man to arrange and commit a crime, then to decorate it with a romantic story, and throw the whole weight of guilt on the shoulders of one whose very name and whereabouts were unknown, and who would, no doubt, in the end, prove to be a mere myth.

, The whole underlying current of police agency was stirred in the heart of Paris, and ran rippling through every vein and artery of that wonderful city. Its nerves and sinews were excited as by an electric shock ; the whole machinery of the secret service had been set in motion, but had failed as yet to

produce even a clue to the criminal charged by Arnold Elmore with the commission of the crime. Hence, many said he had no existence except in the subtle brain of the accused.

There were some, however, who pitied the young Englishman's forlorn and lonely state, and who felt compassion for him: they hoped, and half-believed, that he was innocent; but the matter would soon be proved, so far, at least, as the law could prove it. The law, however, is not infallible: it sometimes makes strange mistakes, and many of these arise from giving too much weight to circumstantial evidence, especially when the tide of circumstances runs strongly against the accused. Valuable as such evidence may be in assisting the judgment to discriminate between guilt and innocence, yet it is never entirely satisfactory. If there be but one link wanting in the chain of inferential guilt, the deficiency should always be in favour of the accused. The law of

England holds that it is better one hundred criminals should escape than that one innocent man should suffer ; and there are few who will question the righteousness and humanity of such a canon. The real facts, however, of Arnold Elmore's case had never reached the public ear ; they had been filtered through semi-official paragraphs, and distorted by idle tongues, till the actual truth had become hidden and lost in a maze of fiction and surmise.

It was a fine bright morning, and crowds clustered round the *café* doors, sipping *café noir*, or some delicious cooling beverage, for which the Parisians are so famous ; others sauntered idly up and down the Boulevards, discussing, in French manner, the current events—among them, the probable result of Arnold's trial. Mingling with the crowd was M. Herchel, his eyes and ears wide open as usual, gathering scraps of conversation, and occasionally extracting a good sugges-

tion from some casual remark. He had evidently some appointment to keep, for he paced up and down the same spot, scarce stirring a hundred yards from it; he continually glanced about him with seeming carelessness, but with actual anxiety. Nothing appeared to escape him; he occasionally raised his hat to some passer-by, spoke to others, and looked askant as a doubtful loungeur elbowed him. Presently, the gentleman with whom he had conversed on the preceding day came with light, buoyant steps along the footway. A peculiar smile broke over M. Herchel's usually imperturbable face, and he hastened forward to greet his new acquaintance.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"No," answered M. Herchel; "I am always unpunctual, for I am ever five minutes at least before my time, and I often gain more in that short space than others do in a whole day; but you are punctual," he added, consulting his watch.

They stood chatting for some minutes on the usual commonplace topics, and, having exhausted such small talk, M. Michel said, pleasantly—

“Well, I hope you have not forgotten that I promised you your revenge. I am quite ready to give it you now.”

“I shall take it with pleasure, or at least, I shall endeavour to take it,” replied M. Herchel; “in a contest with you it is skill against skill, for you see I am not an indifferent player, and excitement always charms me. I love to play with an experienced adversary.” So saying, he linked his arm in that of his new acquaintance, and they sauntered slowly on.

“Suppose we pay a passing visit to Tortoni’s; the ices there are delicious.”

“With all my heart,” replied the stranger, and thither accordingly they proceeded. “These impromptu fraternizations are sometimes delightful; in more than one instance I have derived a lasting

happiness from a chance acquaintance, but I little thought, when I entered Paris, so *triste* and lonely, a short time back, that I should have the good fortune to meet so congenial a spirit as yours."

"You do me too much honour," replied M. Herchel; "it is *I* who should congratulate myself on the meeting, and I heartily trust that our acquaintance may live to yield the fruit which I feel is ripening fast. The longest and firmest friendship is often the growth of a casual fellowship."

"I will not dispute that," said M. Michel; "but you know the world in general holds that it is not wise to pick up friends as you do blackberries by the way-side. Some may turn out sour, and in gathering them you may prick your fingers."

"Ah! but I am not of the world's opinion generally," replied M. Herchel; "I despise the

every-day maxims of society ; they may be right in one instance and wrong in a thousand."

"Quite true," was the reply ; "yet you must admit that, in the case now engrossing the whole of society, a casual acquaintance had been better avoided. I allude to the one this young Englishman so unfortunately made." He paused a moment, as though he expected his companion to reply ; but, as M. Herchel remained silent, he added, "It's a strange story he tells ; I can scarcely credit it. Do you think it will be believed at the trial ?"

"I don't know," replied M. Herchel ; "but I dare say it will be taken for what it is worth. If the husband of the dead lady could be found, he might be able to throw some important light upon the obscurity. There is, I am told, a strong suspicion that M. Gautier himself, or some lover who bore his name, was with the poor lady the very day before her mysterious death, and I am

informed that the police are in search of the husband, but as yet he seems to have entirely escaped their vigilance."

"Humph!" replied the stranger, "there must be something very defective in our police system, though it is said to be the best in the world, or surely he would have been discovered before this time."

"You think so, do you? Well, there seem to me to be many difficulties in the way of it. The circumstance is so uncommon. The man whom the accused accuses, is known only to himself, and he can give no clue, except a mere description of the face and bearing of one——"

"Who, perhaps, has no existence," said his companion, interrupting him quickly.

"Exactly," replied M. Herchel; "it would never do to take the bare unsupported testimony of one who stands in the peculiar position of this young Englishman." He paused a second, and then

added suddenly, "Why, who knows? he might accuse you."

"Why me?" asked the stranger eagerly.

"Or me," continued the detective, smiling blandly. "No man would be safe."

At this moment an open carriage drawn by a pair of handsome gray horses came slowly along; as it passed them, both gentlemen glanced up, and the stranger received a most gracious smile from Madame Radowski, who chanced to be the occupant; as she passed onwards, a pink bow that she was wearing fluttered to the ground. M. Herchel evidently noticed this seemingly slight occurrence, for he smiled and muttered something softly to himself. The stranger, with an expression of profound delight, returned the lady's smile, picked up the fallen ribbon, and placed it in his breast, while M. Herchel exclaimed, with apparent surprise—

"You seem to have made good use of your time,

monsieur: but yesterday a stranger, to-day you are on the most enviable terms with the most charming woman in all Paris. You do not, I see, confine your attentions to the game of billiards; you seem to be equally skilful in the game of love."

"Once give me the cue, and I think I know how to handle it," replied his companion, with a quiet smile.

"You should, when you receive it from so fair a woman. Madame is not usually so lavish of her smiles."

"I was fortunate enough to render her some trifling service," answered the stranger, with affected mystery; "a service I am not quite at liberty to repeat."

"Oh," said M. Herchel, "I would not attempt to pry into any man's secret, especially when a pretty woman is concerned; but this little occurrence reminds me of something I had quite forgotten. It is a little matter of business which I ought

to transact before I give myself up to the pleasure of beating you, for it concerns a lady ; and you are too gallant, I'm sure, to wish to take precedence of one of the gentler sex. I have not far to go, and my business will not detain me long. Have you any objection to accompany me ? There is no secret, I assure you, in the matter in which I am at present concerned, as in all probability, if you do not already know it, you shortly will."

"I shall accompany you with pleasure," replied his companion. "I have nothing to do, and am entirely at your disposal."

They wandered on through the gay crowded streets, chatting and laughing as they went, with the easy familiarity of old friends. Ah ! if some magic touch could at that instant have stripped off the trappings of humanity, and left the two souls standing out in the broad bright sunshine, how would the laughter have died away, and the

smiles have faded on the lip ! but the flesh wraps the spirit as with a garment, concealing and surrounding its movements so that none can see them. Yes ! the eye can brighten, and the lip can smile, while the dark grim shadow of Sin is watching and waiting within the heart, for the accomplishment of the act which is to crown a life's misdeeds with the iron diadem of Despair.

On they went across the Place de la Concorde, and down the Rue de Rivoli, until they reached the Hôtel des Trois Empereurs, opposite the Tuileries. Arrived there, they turned under the archway. M. Herchel gave a smile and a nod to the fat, good-natured *maitresse* who sat knitting in the little courtyard, ready to receive and welcome all new arrivals. Then he opened the glass door, entered the hotel, and ascended the handsome staircase, which was decorated with shrubs and flowers and mirrors, the whole breadth and height of it. On reaching the second floor he turned to the

right. At the end of the gallery he paused, and reflected a moment, as though in some doubt how to proceed. Fortunately a staid middle-aged English waiting-maid came past, and seemed to relieve his perplexity, for she smiled and curtsied as he addressed her in English, and requested her to convey his compliments to Madame, and say that he would be glad to see her at her convenience : he would not detain her long. The maid soon returned, and ushered them into a room looking upon the Louvre.

"Madame," she said, "would be happy to see him in her own room."

"You will excuse my leaving you for a few minutes," said M. Herchel, turning to his companion ; "I shall soon return. Meanwhile, I dare say you will find something to amuse you ;" and he pointed to a heap of books and papers that were scattered on the table.

"Pray don't hurry on my account," replied the

stranger, throwing himself into a chair, and taking up the first book that came to hand, in the contents of which he seemed to become soon interested. Before many minutes had elapsed, the door opened and a light step entered the room; the intruder suddenly paused, the stranger looked up from his book, and instantly rose; his eyes met those of a young lady in deep mourning, with bright golden hair, and a face glowing with youth and freshness, that threw even Madame Radowski's vivacious countenance into the shade. For a second they both stood, as though mute with amazement; then simultaneously the words—

“Raoul!”

“Maude!”

broke from their lips. He stretched out his arms; she sprang forward and was buried in a long, warm embrace. Her delight at their meeting was undisguised and real; and, though he expressed equal pleasure, yet a close observer

might have noticed some slight embarrassment struggling with the gratification that his words expressed.

The meeting was unexpected on both sides; to him it was a most awkward *contretemps*. He felt that he had been suddenly thrown on the horns of a dilemma, from which he would find it most difficult to extricate himself. When the first flush of excitement had passed away, she withdrew herself from his arms, saying—

“You must have heard my heart calling you, dear Raoul. You have learnt our heavy sorrow, and have forgotten your own trouble, in your haste to come and console and support us.”

“Yes,” he exclaimed, catching eagerly at the thought her words suggested, “I have, indeed, forgotten my own trouble in the thought of yours. I have been deeply grieved to hear of Mrs. Elmore’s great sorrow, for I knew my sweet bird would sorrow with her.”

"Who could help feeling for such a grief hers?" replied Maude. "I often reproach myself because I can do so little to console her. times she is quite prostrated and overwhelmed with sorrow."

"I am not surprised at that: her position is frightful one; the wonder is, that she retains her senses; the whole affair has struck the world with universal horror. She is fortunate, however, dear Maude, in having you with her to uphold and comfort her. I have thought of you, and feared to find you utterly cast down, for I know your sensitive spirit well."

As M. St. Pierre spoke, Maude silently reproached herself; he seemed to overrate her susceptibility, and give her more credit in that respect than she deserved; she felt as though she had never sympathized enough with her friend in sorrow; *he*, who was almost a stranger to M. Elmore, and certainly had no reason to love her

overmuch, seemed to feel so much more keenly for her trouble.

"Hers, indeed, has been a bitter affliction," she answered; "I shall be glad when the trial is all over, and we are back again in England; but I suppose we must await the result."

M. St. Pierre looked at her in bewildered amazement. She seemed so calm and collected, and spoke so coolly on the subject, that she appeared as if she were no more interested in the result of the trial than the rest of the world.

"Ah!" he exclaimed eagerly, "perhaps you know more of the matter than I do, and are sure of the result. You have perhaps heard important legal opinions, and believe he will be acquitted?"

"I cannot say," she answered, surprised at his earnestness; "but I suppose if he is accused, tried, and proved innocent, he will be released, according to the laws of justice and humanity."

"Ay, but guilty or not guilty, is it not horrible to be charged with such a crime?"

"Yes; but God will support him."

"But if it come to the worst, and he is condemned, my dearest Maude."

"Well," she answered, "then I shall say that he is guilty, and ask God to forgive him; we pray for all sinners, why not for him, guilty though he be? But why do you speak of this to me?" she added, looking up into his face with wondering eyes. He was taken aback; it then struck him, for the first time, that she was ignorant of the critical position of her old companion.

"Why?" he repeated, after a moment's pause; "oh, merely because the subject is uppermost in all men's minds, and it is one in which I imagined both you and Mrs. Elmore must be deeply interested. I have no other reason, love; but now we will talk of something else."

"Oh, yes; since you have been away, Raoul, a

thousand things have happened that I should have liked to tell you. I could have babbled out my thoughts to you all day long; but now that I see you, I forget everything except that you are here," she said, looking in his face with almost idolatrous affection.

"But tell me what brought you to Paris, dear Maude? How did you hear of Madame Gautier's death?"

"Oh, there was a letter from Mrs. Elmore found upon the poor lady, and we came over to identify the body."

"And why is not Mr. Arnold Elmore with you?"

"How could he be with us when we do not know where he is? He left England with the intention of making a tour through Normandy, but he has only once written home; I have never known him so neglectful before. It is very cruel of him, for his silence is breaking his

mother's heart. It makes me, too, very sad, for I know she considers me the cause of his having left her, and she has such horrible thoughts, she makes me nervous and ill by only speaking of them."

"There may be letters awaiting her in England," suggested St. Pierre.

"No," replied Maude; "we were so anxious about him that we ordered all letters to be forwarded to us here."

"I think it is almost a pity that Mrs. Elmore remains for the trial, Maude," he added, after a moment's pause. "You have no idea of the fatigue and annoyance of a criminal trial. Don't you think you could persuade her to return to London? I will with pleasure remain here, and watch over her interests, for I really think she will be exhausted with the trouble she will be forced to undergo; and, after all, she can do no good."

"Dear Raoul! how kind and thoughtful you are!"

"And selfish too," he added, looking fondly in her face; "for I cannot bear the idea of your name being mentioned in a public court of justice, or your sweet face exposed to be stared at and commented upon by the vulgar. I am proud, too," he added, gravely, "and I would not have the name of my future wife connected with such a case of horror. Oblige me, darling, by promising that, even if Mrs. Elmore remains, *you* will return to England."

A crimson blush overspread Maude's face; there was something in his manner that jarred upon her spirit. She felt hurt and angry; and that she was so was evidenced in her tone, as she answered—

"What! leave my best friend to face her trouble alone! You do not know what you are asking, Raoul. No; I shall remain, at any risk;

but I do not think my name will be brought forward at all; if it should, there will be no shame connected with it; were this melancholy story published to the whole world, it would—it ought to—raise but one feeling, that of compassion for two ladies so unfortunately situated.”

“You are angry, I perceive. It is my love for you that makes me selfish—perhaps ungenerous,” exclaimed St. Pierre, observing the flush upon her face. “Forgive me, dearest; I did not mean to offend you.”

“I am not offended, Raoul; only a little hurt,” replied Maude, soothed, in a moment, by his voice; “it is over now. I am sure you did not mean to wound me.”

“It is only my anxiety for you which makes me urge you to return. I cannot bear to think of your being harassed by this trial, especially as your presence can really do no good.”

“You think it would be well for us to leave

Paris?" she said, looking inquiringly in his face.

"I am sure it would," he answered earnestly. "At any sacrifice, Maude, I would advise you to get Mrs. Elmore back to London before the trial; all her sympathies lie with the dead, who is gone; the punishment of the living rests with the law. She can put all the facts she knows into her counsel's hands. I, as a man, understand these matters well; and I own I tremble for the effect this excitement may have upon you both. As for Mrs. Elmore, with her failing health and nervous constitution, I do not believe she will ever live through it."

"You alarm me, Raoul!" exclaimed Maude, impressed by his solemn tone and manner. "I promise you I will do all I can, but I fear it is impossible for us to leave Paris just now."

"Why impossible?"

"For many reasons; one is, Mrs. Elmore can-

not leave so easily as you suppose; she is detained by a legal process to give evidence; and I have got an invalid to nurse, whom I should not like to leave at present. She is a poor street-singer, whom I found——”

As she was about to communicate to him the story of the sick woman, the door opened, and M. Herchel re-entered the room, followed by Mrs. Elmore, who was quite unprepared, and amazed at perceiving M. St. Pierre, whom, however, she welcomed with cool courtesy.

“I told you, madame,” said M. Herchel, “that I had a friend awaiting me.”

“A friend, yes!” she answered, “but I little thought that I knew your friend;” then, addressing the latter, she added, “we thought you were many miles distant, monsieur.”

“When I heard of your trouble, madame, I endeavoured to forget my own, and hastened to offer you my sympathy.”

Seeing that she did not seem to appreciate his civility, he added, taking Maude's hand—

"Here is another motive too, that may excuse my presence; wherever Miss Vernon is, you need never be surprised should I follow her."

"So many things have happened lately, monsieur," replied Mrs. Elmore, "that I cease to be surprised at anything."

To her M. St. Pierre's presence brought a flood of painful recollections. His unexpected coming seemed the advent of some new disaster. Her heart sank within her, and it was with difficulty she could control her voice, and manage to speak calmly. Maude looked, as indeed she felt, greatly annoyed that her interview with Raoul should be so unceremoniously interrupted. She was troubled too, for she did not like to see M. Herchel on friendly terms with him. She had, also, further matter for consideration. Yesterday, M. Herchel had offended her by his request to see M. St.

Pierre's letter; he had then spoken of him as a stranger; to-day they seemed close friends. What could it all mean?—she was bewildered. Oh, if she could only speak to Raoul for a single moment, to tell him how matters stood—what she knew and what she suspected. She watched for an opportunity; but when she attempted to draw him aside, M. Herchel was sure to put in a word, or approach so near to them, that nothing could escape either his ear or look. In a short time he rose to take his leave, saying to Mrs. Elmore—

“I am afraid I must carry off your friend, madame, for he is engaged to me for the rest of the day. Besides, he would be immersed in your sorrows here; with me pleasure will exhaust his soul.”

St. Pierre looked daggers at M. Herchel, but made no reply. Maude did not seem to hear him.

“You will come back to-night Raoul?” she

whispered anxiously; "I *must* see you, and alone. I have so much to say—so much that you ought to know."

"To-morrow, dearest," he answered.

"Why not to-night?"

"I have a most pressing business engagement," he answered; "you can imagine how pressing it is when it separates me from you. But to-morrow at half-past-twelve I will be with you."

With this promise Maude was compelled to rest content. As soon as they reached the street M. Herchel apologised to M. St. Pierre for bringing him away.

"I don't know," said he, "whether I did right, but I fancied, from the expression of your face, that your meeting with the young lady was rather a *contretemps*."

"You are quite right: it was so; unfortunately I did not even know the two ladies were in Paris."

"I could have told you that," replied M.

Herschel, "but I had no idea you were acquainted with Mrs. Elmore."

"My acquaintance lies rather with her ward, Miss Vernon ; but I acknowledge that I was equally surprised to find you also on such intimate terms with both ladies. Have you been long acquainted?"

"*Entre nous*," said M. Herschel, with an affected air of mystery ; "the whole secret of our acquaintance lies in a nutshell. To tell you the truth, I am an advocate, and am employed by Mrs. Elmore."

"Against the accused?" said St. Pierre, eagerly.

"Of course," replied Herschel, drily ; "it is not likely Mrs. Elmore would defend even the *suspected* murderer of her sister, be he guilty or not guilty."

"He is quite a young man, I have heard?"

"Yes, to look at him you would never suppose he could be guilty of such an act. Of his antecedents, nothing can be learned. I strongly suspect

he has given a false name and address in England."

They then proceeded, as they had at first intended, to Tortoni's, to eat ices, but the manner of each was constrained. St. Pierre was thoughtful and silent; Herchel quiet and watchful. The unexpected meeting with Maude Vernon had shaken St. Pierre's nerves. He certainly never played a worse game than he played that day; and M. Herchel had his revenge, with small trouble and less skill, of Raoul St. Pierre.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

MEANWHILE Arnold Elmore tried to await in patient resignation the result of M. Herchel's investigation. Except his being a prisoner, he had nothing to complain of. He continued to be well lodged, well cared for, and treated in all respects as became a gentleman. Whenever he expressed a wish, it was immediately complied with. He had an abundant supply of books, and his solitude was frequently enlivened by the society of M. Herchel, whose conversation always amused, and sometimes instructed him. Still, there were times when his heart was heavy; he

felt acutely the extreme loneliness and uncertainty of his position. It was strange, he thought, that although he had repeatedly written home, giving minute details of all that had happened to him, yet not a line, not a word, had he received in reply. He had none to console, none to sympathise with him. It would have been strange indeed if it had been otherwise; for, of course, as the reader knows, not one of his letters, after he left Rouen, had found its way to its destination. They were all labelled, and securely locked up in M. Herchel's *escritoire*. But Arnold was ignorant of this fact, and, not knowing that the dead lady was Madame Gautier, he knew nothing of his mother's arrival in Paris. He yearned to hear something of her, and of Maude too, from whom an expression of consolation would have been a blessing indeed. A word of sympathy from those he loved would have braced his nerves to bear the weight that now well-nigh crushed him. What

could this protracted silence mean? It never struck him that either his or their letters might have miscarried; and there were times when he almost doubted the might of his mother's love. He knew that she would not believe him guilty: *that* was impossible; but she was so proud of him, so pure and dignified in her sense of honour, that the mere shadow of suspicion resting on her son might darken her soul for ever. Then he thought of Maude, the high-spirited Maude; what would she feel when she learned that he who had dared to love her, now was charged with murder—the murder of a weak and unoffending woman?

When these thoughts presented themselves, his spirit fairly broke down. So it is: in the blind bewilderment of our own sorrow, we are apt to misjudge and misread those who love us best. He little thought that those warm true friends were so near to him, yearning for him, praying with all their hearts for his safety and welfare.

Meanwhile, Maude was steadfast in her resolve to do her utmost for the poor singing-woman, and she exerted herself nobly, allowing nothing to interfere with her attention to the forlorn one. It was a touching spectacle to see her lying on the couch of sickness, an unknown wanderer in a strange land; one of those shattered wrecks that are too often cast upon the shores of life, unheeded, uncared for; one of those mysteries of time that are to be solved in heaven. The physician's fears were fully verified; the poor creature suffered from a severe attack of brain-fever. Her long dark hair was closely cut, and ice laid upon her fevered forehead. Her eyes, unnaturally bright, were always open; she never closed them, even to sleep. Strange to say, through all her delirium there were no violent ravings; her thoughts seemed merely to wander away, and bask, like butterflies, in the sunny atmosphere of past days. She had hitherto spoken in provincial

French, but now in her delirium she spoke in the musical *patois* of Southern Italy, and prattled of the green hills and valleys of her native home ; imagination, more kind than reality, carried her back to the early springtide of her life, and refreshed her worn spirit with sights and sounds that had been long hushed and buried in the past. No matter ; they were all real and present to her now, and she sometimes laughed rejoicingly, as though once more enjoying the innocent pleasures of childhood.

Maude and Mrs. Elmore had both become deeply interested in their helpless charge, and were anxious to know something of her antecedents ; they wondered if she had a father, mother, or friends living, to whom they might communicate her sad plight. Sometimes they would bend over her and listen to her murmurings, anxious to catch a gleam of reason, a ray of light, to guide them through the darkness in which her history was

shrouded; but they could learn nothing; her words were incoherent, a mere medley of unconnected thoughts. Occasionally she would burst out into passionate upbraidings of one who evidently stood sharply defined in her mind's eye. She would gaze so intently on the empty air and talk so passionately, that Maude would sometimes shiver, and turn round half-expecting to see a stranger present; then her voice would die away into a strain of plaintive mourning, or rise into tones of melody, as though her swelling soul would fain burst its mortal bonds, and soar away from earth on the wings of music.

It was strange, at such times, to observe the little elf-like child; it would sit for hours on the bed by its mother's side, its distended eyes fixed wonderingly on the sick woman's face, listening to her wild wanderings, or playing with her long, thin fingers; but the child was always silent and grave, as though the parent's suffering cast

a shadow over the mind of the little one, affecting it with a sorrow beyond outward expression.

It was the second day of the poor woman's fever; the sick-nurse whom they had engaged to attend on her had gone to rest for a few hours, and Maude and Mrs. Elmore sat silent watchers of the invalid; the weather was very warm, and they drew back the curtains, and opened the window to admit more light and air to the sick-room. The invalid lay still and silent, so still, that they believed she slept. She had been uneasy in the earlier part of the morning, and, in her restless tossings, her night-dress had become disarranged, and the black ribbon, which they had before observed about her neck, being loosened, the child had drawn it from its mother's bosom, and was twisting it round its fingers, playing with a morocco case, which hung suspended from it. Hitherto the poor singer, even in her delirium,

had kept this about her neck, sometimes clasping it in her hand with jealous care ; but now, she lay in a state of lethargy, apparently unconscious of its removal.

From no motives of idle curiosity, but in the belief that they might obtain therefrom some clue to the poor woman's history, Maude took the case from the child's hand, touched the spring, and it flew open. In a few moments Mrs. Elmore looked up, and was surprised to see her companion sitting still and motionless, and gazing on something within the case, with a face of deathlike pallor. She rose hastily from her seat, went forward, and looked over Maude's shoulder. The movement recalled Maude to herself ; a sickly smile trembled on her lips, as she handed the open case, which contained a portrait, to Mrs. Elmore.

"It is very like—a person whom we both know," said Maude ; and as she spoke she looked with a yearning expression into her friend's face, as

though in hope of receiving a contradictory response.

Mrs. Elmore merely glanced upon the portrait, and the exclamation, "St. Pierre!" broke involuntarily from her lips.

"Yes," it is very like," said Maude, "but it is impossible that it can be he."

"Why impossible?" inquired Mrs. Elmore.

"Why!" echoed Maude, "how could his portrait get into the possession of such a creature as *that*?" And she pointed scornfully at the stricken being whom she had hitherto nursed with so much tenderness and care.

"How?" repeated Mrs. Elmore; "go into the public streets, and ask the first wretched being of our sex you meet, how she first became acquainted with vice, poverty, and shame!"

"I shall ask nothing. I know you are too willing to believe anything evil of *him*. You *hate* him; but I shall believe nothing," said Maude

steadily, "that can bring sorrow to me, or shame to him." She was silent for a moment, and there was a touching appeal in her tone and manner as she added, "I wonder how it is that you, who are so kind and generous to all the world besides, are so cold and cruel in your thoughts of him? I believe you would rejoice if you could but trace the source of all this world's ill to him alone."

"I should rejoice in anything that set you free from him," replied Mrs. Elmore, evasively. "I admit that."

"I am self-bound," said Maude, "and I have no desire to be free." Again she riveted her gaze upon the picture, and murmured, half to herself, and half aloud, "Yes, it is like—so like," she added, in a suffocating voice, "that I will admit it may be he;" and she closed the case with a hasty snap.

"And having admitted so much," exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, eagerly; but before she could

finish her sentence, Maude interrupted her hastily—

“I admit no more ; nothing, not even a thought tending to his dishonour. Remember Elaine and the knight Sir Lancelot ! The maiden’s folly was no fault of his ; and, though even in death she followed him — nay, persecuted him with her unsought, slighted love, she drew compassion to herself, but no shame could fall on him.”

“You talk folly, Maude. Elaine is a graceful poem ; this,” she added, pointing to the bed, “is a case of melancholy prose.”

“The one arises from the other,” returned Maude. “The melancholy fact is the foundation of the poet’s fancy. Were there no streams of living misery, there would have been no ‘Bridge of Sighs.’”

“My dearest child, you wander from the matter ; you are far too right-minded, too pure, to attempt to gloze over such a scene as this. Here lies the

naked fact : this poor soul has evidently built her 'bridge of sighs,' and is going shivering over it into eternity ; she will leave behind her this tainted fruit of folly, to be cast forth, like a weed, upon the highway of life, and be trampled down. I believe this wretched desolation we now look upon, the misery of this outcast mother and nameless child, to be that man's—your betrothed husband's—work. Oh, Maude ! Maude ! if this sin be indeed brought home to him to whom you have promised your hand and heart, can you stand before the altar, haunted by the recollection of such a scene as this, and there swear to love and honour the author of this woman's ruin ?" She spoke impressively, for she was only weak and feeble where her son was concerned. "Can you, I ask, swear to love and honour the author of so much sin and misery ?"

A severe struggle agitated Maude's breast : it was evident in the burning light of anguish that

slowly kindled in her eyes; she breathed with difficulty, as though striving to smother the doubt and dread that began to stir within her—the doubt of his worth to whose hands she was about to commit the care of her whole future life. It cannot be said she believed the appearances that were against him; but she began to dread. A tremulous terror seized her lest the love-light which encircled him like a halo should fade away, his robes of honour drop off one by one, and leave him—her god—like the veiled prophet of Khorassan, a tainted, sin-stained thing of clay. In vain she tried to shut her eyes against the truth that would rise unbidden in her mind, taking shape and colour from surrounding circumstances, becoming every moment more distinct and clear to her mental vision, until it weighed like an incubus upon her spirit. She tried to shake it off, to remember that the accuser was her dear one's enemy, that she who listened was his affianced.

wife: as such, she felt it was her duty to defend him until the last inch of ground was cut by Truth's keen scythe from beneath her feet. She tried to conceal her emotion, to hide her new-born fears from Mrs. Elmore; but, despite her best endeavours, her wavering spirit revealed itself too visibly in her tremulous tones as she answered—

“You may be right; all that you have said may be true——”

“May!” broke in Mrs. Elmore; “it must be true. Look at the child—how strongly it resembles him! and it bears his name too!”

“It is a sin of the past,” said Maude, “and is no doubt already repented of—a sin that may even now be repaired.”

“Repaired!” echoed Mrs. Elmore. “How, child? The world's history tells us that such evil as this can never be repaired.”

“But you have no proof that he is guilty,” said Maude, eagerly; “all this, at best, is but

presumptive evidence. Wait before you condemn him further; hear what he has to say. He may be able to defend himself better than you expect. I will bring him here: he shall stand by her bedside, look upon her face, and admit or deny that he is guilty. He may be able to explain."

"Explain!" repeated Mrs. Elmore, impatiently; "you are too credulous, Maude. If he were to attempt to explain away the very fact of your existence, and convince you that you have never lived at all, you would be too much inclined to believe him. Be advised by me; give him no time to explain or to invent a lie. Hear but the one word—the admission or denial of this cruel sin."

"I shall hear all that he has to say," exclaimed Maude, fiercely. "Why should I listen to *you*, and refuse to hear him? I receive your opinions with distrust, for you have always hated him. An advocate and a hearing are allowed to the

vilest criminal that crawls the earth ; and shall I deny the one or the other to him who is almost my husband ? No ! He shall speak ; my heart will be his advocate ; and I will believe his word even if it be opposed to this, which you call proof. If he admit that this weight of misery is of his making, then——,” she paused, and hid her face in her hands, and the hysterical sobs seemed to be rising in her throat.

“Then ?” echoed Mrs. Elmore, impatient to hear the end of the sentence. “Well, Maude, what then ?” There was perhaps a sound of expected triumph in her tone which jarred on Maude’s sensitive spirit. She felt as though she was being driven to speak his doom before he had a chance of defending himself. She lifted her head, angrily and proudly, like a stag at bay.

“Well,” she exclaimed, “even *then*, I shall best know how much to condemn, and how much to forgive.”

"Forgive, child? I tremble for you. God knows I have learned to love you as a daughter. I should take your sorrow or shame to heart as though it were my own. I am not moved by any selfish motive now; I do not speak for my son's sake, but for your own. My dearest Maude, I know it is a common weakness among women to expect faith and loyalty in the future when the past is filled with treachery and shame. Do not delude yourself with such a hope; for it is a delusion to believe that a man who has been false and cruel to one woman can ever be true and tender to another. You know," she added, impressively, "from experience, during the many years we have lived together, how much I love you. Still, believe me, rather than you should become the wife of M. St. Pierre, I would rejoice to see you in your grave."

An expression of acute pain crossed the young girl's face, as she looked up and said passionately—

"Why will you torture me with these cold, cruel words? Do you not see how much I suffer? Can you not understand that I am wretched, and is not that enough? Why will you enlarge upon the cause, and exult so openly in his sin and my sorrow?"

A moment more, and she had thrown herself into Mrs. Elmore's arms, spirit-broken and subdued, her pride, her anger were gone, and she sobbed aloud.

"Bear with me," she said, in a voice choking with emotion; "I have need of all your love and comfort now. Take me back into your heart, for my own is breaking."

Mrs. Elmore understood Maude better now; the outward angry indignation she had exhibited, her fierce upholding of the man she loved was but the frothy foaming of a bitter grief. She could not bear to hear the truth, or to acknowledge even to herself that *she* was deceived, or *he* un-

worthy. Mrs. Elmore, with the natural kindness of her heart, became the judicious friend and comforter. She no longer inveighed against M. St. Pierre; there was no bitterness in her tone, no sarcasm in the words she uttered now; nothing but pity, love, and sympathy for her foster-child. She believed that in this struggle between love and justice she, as the champion of right, had triumphed; and, like a generous conqueror, she bore her victory in silence.

Mrs. Elmore spoke and acted with so much tact that Maude's stormy grief soon exhausted itself, and within an hour they two were quietly consulting together as to what should be done next. It was decided that Maude should receive M. St. Pierre at half-past twelve on the morrow, according to the standing arrangement, and quietly tell him the story of the poor singing-woman—then lead him up to her bed-side, and let him look unexpectedly on her face. On the result of

this approaching interview Maude promised that her future conduct should depend. She would make no promise of what she would or would not do ; she would be guided by circumstances, she said.

Maude was not one to be utterly cast down and broken, because her love had been unfortunate and misplaced. After the first outburst of feeling had subsided, she became calmer and more reasonable ; though wounded in spirit and pained at heart, whatever happened she resolved to be true to herself. If he were proved guilty of one base, dishonourable act, she would not marry him, though he laid a world at her feet. She felt that a woman's love cast upon a worthless object is like good seed thrown upon stony ground—it must perish. To love nobly, the object must be noble. Without respect and esteem, love will soon die out, even from the warmest hearts. True, it may sometimes linger on, a weak, feeble,

attenuated thing, living on hope of the future, and clinging for support to some frail memory of the past.

But a nature like Maude Vernon's could not love in that abject fashion. If the profound respect, the veneration she felt for M. St. Pierre perished, love must perish too. She knew that she would suffer; but it was better to suffer one sharp pang than the protracted misery of a lifetime. Yet, in spite of herself, she clung to the hope that he was not guilty—at least not quite so guilty as it seemed. If the poor invalid could be roused to consciousness, even for an hour, or a few minutes only, she might be induced to tell her tale, and set the matter at rest. They bent over her, spoke to her softly, and tried in many ways to restore her senses, to gather a grain of intelligence from her fitful words; but in vain. When she spoke, her words were wholly unintelligible.

Unfortunately, at M. Herchel's special request, they had engaged themselves for that evening, and promised to attend an assembly at one of the most fashionable houses in Paris. At first Mrs. Elmore had declined, pleading the unseemliness of mingling in gay scenes so soon after her sad bereavement, and whilst so much melancholy mystery surrounded it. But the officer overcame her scruples, and convinced her that he had good reasons for desiring her presence, and she had accordingly consented to go.

Maude, who had felt very dull and wearied during her stay in Paris, was at first delighted at the prospect of a novelty, in the shape of a brilliant Parisian assembly; but matters had changed since then, and now she would gladly have remained at home; Mrs. Elmore, however, insisted that the engagement should be kept.

Mrs. Elmore could not help exulting privately in the prospect of M. St. Pierre's disgrace; she

plumed herself on her penetration, in having always suspected him, and in never having been deceived in her impressions, favourable or the reverse, of those whose character she had an opportunity of observing. She had great difficulty in controlling her speech; for she was inclined to re-open a battery of doubts and fears on M. St. Pierre; but she knew that if she moved to the attack, Maude would rise and arm for the defence. So for once Mrs. Elmore acted prudently, and left the absent enemy at peace, till the time should arrive for him to appear, like an honourable foe, in open field.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGE AND YET MORE STRANGE DISCLOSURES.

THE day on which the events described in our last chapter occurred was an eventful one to others besides Maude Vernon. Early in the morning M. Herchel paid a visit to Arnold Elmore. The officer seemed more brisk and hopeful than usual, and apologized for having been absent longer than was his custom.

“I have not seen you for two entire days,” he said; “nevertheless, I have not been idle, but have been labouring hard in your cause, as you shall see;” and, as he spoke, he pulled from his

pocket a collection of photographs, and threw them on the table, adding, "Look carefully over these, and tell me if you recognise any familiar face among them."

Arnold turned them over one by one, and was struck by the kind of indirect likeness that ran more or less through them all; there was something in each one which suggested a thought of Dr. La Belle, but none answered exactly to the man himself. When he got to about the tenth he started, and held it up eagerly.

"Here it is at last!" he exclaimed. "Here is Dr. La Belle—the man I met on St. Catherine's Mount!"

"You are quite right," replied M. Herchel, smiling: "that is Dr. La Belle; but it is not the man we want. That is the real Dr. La Belle, whom we saw together at Rouen. You remember, he gave me a *carte-de-visite*; and with the help of that, which I have multiplied in this smaller size, I have been

enabled to collect this mass, having sent copies into every city and town in France, with orders to have photographs taken of every man who bore any resemblance, even the very slightest, to the copy I sent. The result has been the collection which you now see before you. But go on to the end; don't decide too hastily."

Arnold did so, and when he came to the last but one, he took it up and examined it carefully, more carefully than he had done any of the rest, as though resolved he would not be mistaken a second time; then he threw it down, exclaiming—

"There! that is the man who called himself Dr. La Belle, and placed the unfortunate lady under my charge at Rouen. I could swear to him. Ah!" he added, again taking up the portrait, as though struck by a sudden thought, "stay; have you a strong magnifying glass?" M. Herschel produced one immediately. "There," added Arnold, examining it through the glass, "look at

his hand, and you will see a small spot; it is the mole, on the very place I told you of, on the back of the right hand. See! there it is, near the fore-finger!"

M. Herchel also examined it, and acknowledged that he saw the mark distinctly.

"It is very strange," he said, "that you should identify this man as the pseudo Dr. La Belle, for it is in reality a *carte-de-visite* of M. Gautier, who was the husband of the murdered lady."

"Gautier! Gautier, of Beauvais?" exclaimed Arnold, with unfeigned horror.

"The same," replied M. Herchel, quietly.

"The husband, you say, of the murdered lady?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Heavens! then that unfortunate woman was my mother's sister. There was something, then, in the dead face, a likeness strong in death, that struck me with so much horror. My aunt, my poor aunt Constance, of whose sorrows I had but

indistinctly heard—and I have clasped her murderer's hand ! it is horrible ; but are you sure—is there no doubt that it was Madame Gautier ?”

“So we have every reason to believe,” replied M. Herchel.

“Villain ! unmitigated villain !” exclaimed Arnold, pacing the room excitedly ; “but now, since you have this clue, you will find no difficulty ; you know your man, and must discover him.”

“We shall try,” said Herchel, quietly ; “and when he is found——”

“Thank God !” exclaimed Arnold, impulsively, interrupting him, “I shall be acquitted.”

“We shall do our best for you,” replied M. Herchel ; “but there are more difficulties in the way of your acquittal than you may, perhaps, believe. Remember, at present we have only your unsupported word that he is guilty. I have weighed the matter well, and I am afraid the law will require more proof than it is in your power

to give ; but I have no doubt we shall obtain this proof : indeed, I am quite sanguine about the matter ; rest assured we shall do our best for you."

"Of that I am quite certain," replied Arnold, fervently, "and for the rest, I am in God's hands ; but let what will happen, I shall be ever grateful to you for all your kindness." He wrung the officer's hand warmly as he spoke. "My own friends seem to have deserted me ; but I have found one friend at least in you."

"By the way," said M. Herchel, as he was about to take his departure, "I have made an engagement for this evening, and should like you to accompany me. Permission for your temporary freedom should be obtained from the proper authorities. I will send you a fitting dress ; you will mix in some charming society," and, he added with a peculiar smile, "I don't think you will repent your visit. I will call for you at eight o'clock this evening."

He remained a few minutes chatting upon indifferent subjects, and then took his leave. In the course of an hour, the same military costume which he had worn on former occasions, when under charge of M. Herchel, to further the ends of the investigation that was being made by the police, was brought to him; he had no hesitation in putting it on, for by this time he had learned to yield unquestioning obedience to any request of M. Herchel's, which came in the shape of a command, however much politeness disguised it.

At the appointed hour the carriage drew up to the door, both gentlemen got in, and were driven rapidly through the streets; they soon stopped, and Arnold, looking out, saw that they were in the rear of the long line of carriages which were slowly setting down their occupants at a brilliantly-lighted mansion. Nearer and nearer the carriage gradually rolled, until it stopped opposite to the door. M. Herchel and Arnold alighted,

and arm-in-arm ascended the steps ; on entering the vestibule, they found an array of servants in handsome liveries in attendance, to announce and conduct the guests into the presence of the mistress of the mansion. Slowly they made their way up the crowded staircase, which was elegantly decorated, and the air was redolent with the perfume of sweet flowers.

At the entrance to a suite of reception-rooms stood a beautiful and tastefully-dressed woman, who was graciously receiving her visitors. She and M. Herchel were evidently old friends ; he introduced Arnold to her—

“My friend, Mr. Elmore.”

She curtsied, and gave him a graceful and cordial welcome. She spoke to him in his own language ; her voice was soft and musical, and the accents of broken English sounded charming from her lips ; after conversing with him for a few brief moments, which were, however, long enough

to impress him with a high sense of her wit and beauty, she apologised for her broken English, and, turning to a grave-looking gentleman, who stood by her side intently regarding the group, introduced him to Arnold, saying—

“This is my brother ; he speaks your language well, and will, I am sure, be delighted to converse with you.”

She smiled graciously, the two gentlemen bowed, and, other guests arriving in quick succession, Arnold reluctantly passed on with M. Herchel and his new acquaintance.

He was quite unprepared for the scene of magnificence he encountered as he entered the saloon. The apartment was richly furnished, brilliantly lighted, and filled with company—the *élite* of the wealth, beauty, and fashion of Paris. There were gray, grave-looking statesmen, with their different orders glittering on their breasts ; gallant soldiers, with gorgeous uniforms

and martial air ; and graceful women with bright-coloured gauzy dresses, rich jewels, sparkling eyes and smiling faces. Some were moving about with swan-like elegance, others gathered together in little knots, discussing poetry or politics, wit or wisdom, according to their several tastes.

Arnold was at first dazzled by the lights, the colours, and the mass of strange faces that surrounded him on all sides ; bewildered by the confused murmur of voices, and the sparkling symphony of low laughter, that floated through the air, and mingled with the gay strains of music.

M. Herchel led the way leisurely through these gay groups, occasionally receiving a smile from one person, a familiar nod from another, but stopping to converse with none. They left the saloon, passed through a narrow corridor and entered a small recess, a kind of alcove, lighted with wax candles, and containing a few chairs,

and a marqueterie table, whereon were scattered papers and books. One end of the recess, where Arnold believed there was a window, was covered with crimson curtains. Here Herchel left them. In this retreat they could see nothing of the gaiety that was going on ; but the sound of voices, the music, and even the rustling of the ladies' dresses, were wafted to their ears. Occasionally, voices sounded very near them, so near that every syllable that was uttered could be distinctly heard. Arnold felt uncomfortable, fearing that they might chance to hear more than was meant for their ears ; but his companion engaged him in a ceaseless flow of pleasing conversation. Presently, in the midst of an animated discussion, Arnold started, and, turning his head sharply round, seemed to listen intently to the mingled sound of many voices.

"Hush !" he exclaimed, and leant eagerly forward, as though his very soul rose up to listen.

The gentleman, who had been introduced to him as the brother of their charming hostess, seized his hand, placed his fingers on his wrist, and said—

“Your pulse quickens, monsieur! What is the meaning of it? What is it you hear?”

“I recognise a voice I know, a voice I have heard before.” In his excitement Arnold would have sprung from his seat, but a strong hand held him back. “Monsieur,” he exclaimed, passionately, “let me go! my life, my honour is concerned. Herchel! Herchel! where are you?”

“Here,” answered the well-known voice at his elbow. “Hush! speak low, or you may ruin all.” His impressive voice of authority had its effect.

“It is he,” whispered Arnold, “Dr. La Belle. I heard his voice! There! again!” he added, breathlessly, “I could swear to it; ay, swear to it among a thousand!”

“I guessed as much,” replied M. Herchel,

heartily; "perhaps you would like to see him, and thus make assurance doubly sure."

In a moment the lights were extinguished, and they were in total darkness. M. Herchel, with a rapid movement, undrew the curtains and pointed to a large looking-glass, or rather, oval-shaped mirror, on their right-hand, which reflected all that was passing on their left. Arnold glanced rapidly over the brilliant throng, that moved shadow-like on its polished surface, till his eye lighted on the man he sought.

"There! that is he!" he exclaimed, bending eagerly forward, and pointing to M. Herchel's chance acquaintance of the Champs Elysées, who was engaged in earnest conversation with their charming hostess, Madame Radowski. "Let me go, and brand him before the world with his infamous crime! Let me go! I say you have no right to keep me here while he is at liberty."

"No," whispered Herchel, in a calm authorita-

tive tone. "Rest here, silent and still; we must have every link complete before we fasten the chain." He paused a second, and then added, "You are in my hands; trust me." The last words had hardly left his lips, when he was startled by a hurried exclamation which burst from Arnold's lips.

"My mother!" and his voice faltered, the word he would have said died in his throat; he was overcome; the rush of changing emotions was too much for him, or perhaps his feelings were too sacred to find vent in words, or to let fall upon a stranger's ear. He leaned forward, and looked as though he would have gazed his soul out from his eyes, so fixt and rapturous was their expression, as they rested on his mother and Maude Vernon, whose figures, in mourning costume, stood out in bold relief from the rest of the gay company. Maude, in her fair, queen-like beauty, and simple, sombre dress, was a striking contrast to the spark-

ling ladies who surrounded them. Arnold was bewildered; a hundred thoughts rushed with the rapidity of lightning through his brain. They were in mourning! Was it for Madame Gautier? How much, or how little, did they know of that tragic history? Did they know that he was charged with the crime, and if so, could they have the heart to mingle in a scene like this?

While these and numberless other questions suggested themselves to his mind, Mrs. Elmore and Maude had made their way steadily to the spot where the fictitious Dr. La Belle was still conversing with Madame Radowski. Arnold breathed quickly, and clasped M. Herchel's hand convulsively, as though that could uphold and support him.

Dr. La Belle turned round—Maude raised her head; his face turned white, and hers flushed crimson as their eyes met. For a moment Arnold was mute with amazement. The same eyes which

greeted him on St. Catherine's Mount now rested upon her, the same voice addressed her, and she opened her lips and answered him!

"Is this real?" exclaimed Arnold, huskily, "or is my brain overwrought, and am I mad? What can this mean?"

"It means," whispered M. Herchel, "that the young lady in black, Miss Vernon, is the affianced bride of that man—Monsieur Gautier, *alias* La Belle, *alias* St. Pierre!"

As these words fell on Arnold's ear, his excitement burst all bounds.

"No! no! in mercy, no—not that!" he cried out aloud. "Ah, see! the murderer's eyes are on her! and—oh, God! she must be saved. Oh, Maude! my love, my love!"

In spite of the swelling sounds of the music, the nimble feet of the dancers, and the busy hum of life that surrounded them, it was evident Maude heard that voice of anguish rising over all;

for she started, and turned her head in the direction whence it proceeded. At the same moment the scene was shut from Arnold's eyes, the curtains were rapidly closed, and he was hurried away by M. Herchel, who conducted him through sundry dimly-lighted passages out into the street, where a carriage awaited them. They entered it, and M. Herchel desired the coachman to drive "Home."

To all Arnold's excited and numerous inquiries and conjectures, M. Herchel had but one reply—

"Patience, and in due time all will be explained."

Arrived at Arnold's lodging, which might almost be called his prison, M. Herchel shook him warmly by the hand, and embraced him, in French fashion; he told him that virtually he might consider himself free, though there were many judicial formalities to be gone through before he could be fully restored to liberty.

"Of course," added M. Herchel, "we must retain you in our guardianship a short time longer; but you shall be free to come and go at your own pleasure. You will be released on your *parole d'honneur*, provided that you are always ready to give us any assistance we may require."

Arnold readily gave the required pledge, and then impatiently inquired—

"But my mother, M. Herchel—her presence here, and the scene I have witnessed to-night, bewilders me. Is she here at your request?"

"I will prepare her to receive you to-morrow at breakfast, and then she can herself answer all your inquiries; but I have many things to think of and to do in the meanwhile;" and seeing that Arnold was overflowing with anxiety to talk, to ask for all sorts of explanations, M. Herchel stopped him, saying—

"Pray don't interrupt me; I have no time to answer you. To-morrow, as I have told you, all

may be explained. First, let me do my duty, that is, to restore your letters"—he placed in Arnold's hand all the letters he had written since his first arrival in Paris. "The seals are broken," added M. Herchel, "for it was my duty to read them. I thought it best to withhold all your communications from Mrs. Elmore, who is in utter ignorance of your position."

"Thank God!" said Arnold, fervently. "*Now* I can thank God for that."

"I shall see her again to-night," resumed M. Herchel, "and will tell her she may expect you at the Hôtel des Trois Empereurs to-morrow. Before we part, however, I have one request to make to you, with which I hope you will comply. Dr. La Belle—or, I should rather say, M. Gautier—is staying in the Rue St. Honoré. Will you oblige me by calling on him to-morrow at noon, punctually?"

"Certainly; I can have no possible objection;

I am only too anxious to see him, and compel him to give an explanation. Of course you will accompany me, and bear witness to all he says. When I charge him he will not dare to deny one word of the story I have told to you."

"No," replied M. Herchel; "it is absolutely necessary that you should go alone."

"Why?" inquired Arnold, astonished. "I should certainly prefer a witness to our interview."

"No matter; I am sure you will lay aside your own opinion, and oblige me by paying the visit alone; it must be so, or you will frustrate all that we are doing in your behalf. You will go?"

"Well, yes; if you wish it, I will certainly go," replied Arnold, in a half-hesitating manner.

"I do wish it especially," replied M. Herchel. "May I rely on you?"

"Certainly," replied Arnold; "I have pro-

mised, and I never break my word. At twelve punctually I will be there."

With this assurance M. Herchel was, or seemed to be, content, and, leaving him, returned to Madame Radowski's with a thoughtful countenance.

Arnold, left entirely to himself, was in a state of maddening excitement; his brain seemed on fire, in such a whirl of confusion he had no power to think calmly, or to reason on any point; the past and the present seemed confounded together; it seemed like a dream, a horrible dream, from which he was awakening. When he shut his eyes he could see again, terrible in its distinctness, the dead face, the eyeballs glaring at him as though he had been her murderer, and he felt as if that horrid stare would haunt him for ever. He went that awful journey again, heard the engine scream, and saw the mass of threatening faces scowling in silent horror upon him. Then Maude's face, in its soft womanly beauty, rose up calm and dignified

in the midst of all this; then the murderer's dark face bent over her, shadowing her beauty and tainting her purity by the bare reflection of his crime. There seemed to be a world of mysteries revolving round him—incomprehensible now, but to be explained upon the morrow. After a time he fell asleep from pure exhaustion. He dreamed that the serpent ring he had once seen on Maude's finger slowly uncoiled itself, magnified, and grew larger and larger, and twined itself round her body, gliding in and out about her golden hair, darting its forked fangs into her breast, and leaving a trail of slime and blood in its track. He tried to shield, to save her—but in vain—in vain.

CHAPTER X.

THE IDOL BROKEN.

THE meeting between Maude Vernon and M. St. Pierre at the ball was so unexpected by either, that both for a moment seemed to be struck dumb with surprise. Their eyes met, and one mute interrogatory glance passed between them, before either spoke. M. St. Pierre was as pale as death; never in his whole life had he been so thoroughly taken aback. Those two figures, attired in the garb of mourning, loomed like spectres before his guilty conscience. He could understand Mrs. Elmore's cold greeting, for he knew she hated him; but

Maude's look bewildered him. A few hours ago, they had met with unexpected pleasure, on her part at least, and parted with regret. How changed she looked now ! What a strange, cold spirit looked out from her soft blue eyes ! His heart sank ; was this meeting ominous ? A thousand terrible thoughts rushed through his brain. Her lip quivered ; he fancied she was about to speak, to pronounce his doom, but she only gazed fixedly upon him, and spoke not.

" You seem surprised and angry, dearest Maude," he whispered, " to see me here in this scene of gaiety ; I also am surprised to see *you* ; we are mutually amazed : is it not so ? Indeed, after my great loss and grief, my presence here does require and you shall have a satisfactory explanation ; believe me, necessity alone has brought me to this place. I told you I had an appointment to-night : it is here ; but I will explain all at another time." He attempted to take her hand, but she

would not permit it. "Hear me, dear Maude; do not fix such a cold, stony look upon me," he continued. "Why will you not speak? it seems to me that I have committed an offence too small to be visited with such great displeasure. At least let me explain."

"Not here," said Maude, coldly. "If you will follow us to our hotel, I will hear you there. There are many things to be explained before you and I can clasp hands again."

M. St. Pierre ground his teeth with suppressed rage at her cold reserve; but he was too wise to give open vent to his feelings. He endeavoured to smile, and whisper some propitiatory words; but as she passed on, and neither heeded nor answered him, he had no other course than to follow her. It was at this moment that Arnold had looked down upon them and uttered that cry of anguish. Maude started, turned in the direction whence it came, and listened; but she heard no more.

As they were passing out at the door, they met M. Herchel re-entering the mansion. He bowed politely, and stood on one side to give room for them to pass; then, following behind, he spoke in a subdued tone to Mrs. Elmore; but his words seemed to electrify her.

“My son! my son!” she exclaimed, and would have fallen, had not M. Herchel supported her.

The attentive officer called Mrs. Elmore’s carriage, and handed the two ladies into it. As Raoul was about to follow them, M. Herchel closed the door, and said—

“A word with you, my friend: I have a message to you from Madame Radowski. She will see you at half-past ten o’clock to-morrow morning, punctually. You are indeed a fortunate fellow—you seem to have secured yourself so well in her good graces.”

“Thanks, thanks; but how came *you* here? I thought you were not acquainted with Madame.”

"I came with a friend, who was kind enough to introduce me," replied M. Herchel. "You are not the only fortunate man in Paris."

"I see—I understand," said St. Pierre, quickly. "Tell Madame Radowski I will be punctual: but those two ladies—I have lost sight of them; which way did they go?"

"I heard them direct their coachman to the Hôtel des Trois Empereurs. Adieu." And M. Herchel re-entered the house and mingled once more with the gay company, who were all unconscious that Guilt had walked bare-browed among them, and that Justice had been tightening her grasp on the criminal.

Raoul jumped into a *fiacre*, and arrived exactly as Mrs. Elmore's carriage drove up to the door. Mrs. Elmore went direct to her room, and Maude and Raoul St. Pierre stood face to face alone. She stood silent, and waited for him to speak.

"My dearest Maude," he exclaimed, "what can have happened to make you so strangely changed and cold? We parted with warm, loving affection, which, on my side, has increased hourly. You have never been an hour absent from my thought, and I have pined to look upon your face. When I heard of your trouble I flew to comfort you; you received me with your old sweet smiles. What have I done in these last few hours to cause this change? I never dreamed that you would meet me thus."

"Nor I," replied Maude, faintly. He advanced to embrace her; but she turned from him with such an upbraiding look that he instinctively recoiled.

"What have I done?" he inquired; "or rather what enemy has slandered me?"

"No enemy of yours would dare to slander you in my presence: you know that well," said Maude, proudly. "In your absence I would not hear a

word against you, either from my friends or your enemies."

"Then, again, I ask, what have I done? Tell me, I beseech you. Maude, you are too generous, too noble, to condemn even an enemy unheard."

Maude was silent.

"In the name of justice," continued Raoul, "let me know what accusation you have against me, that I may defend myself. To your cold, unspoken scorn I can find no answer. You have no right to judge me in your heart, and condemn me with your eyes, and yet leave the charge unspoken. Again, I ask—I will ask no more—what have I done?"

Maude still continued silently gazing at him. She did not know what to say, or how to speak of the charge she had to bring against him.

"Speak, I beseech you. I am so convinced of my own truth, integrity, and love," he said, "that

I shall find no difficulty in convincing you that you wrong me."

"Heaven grant you may!" at last said Maude; and her voice faltered as she added, "Raoul, perhaps this may be the last time I shall call you by that name. If you convince me that I have wronged you, I shall be so humbled, so abased and ashamed, that I will kneel and beg for your forgiveness—yes, and I shall hate myself for ever for my injustice."

"Spoken like my own true-hearted Maude," he exclaimed, his courage rising as he spoke. "Now tell me my sin." He looked grand and noble, as though sin and he were strangers, and he could bid defiance even to fate.

"I cannot tell it," she replied, the colour deepening on her cheek. "Come with me, and I will show it to you."

She lighted a taper, and ascended the stairs, followed by M. St. Pierre; the latter wondering

more and more what sight fortune had prepared for him.

Maude gently opened the invalid's door, and entered noiselessly ; then, turning round, she raised her hand and motioned to Raoul to be silent. He stood anxiously awaiting the issue of this, to him, incomprehensible adventure. In the dimly-lighted room he saw nothing but a bed. Not a word was spoken ; the silence was so solemn that he felt awe-struck and bewildered. Maude beckoned him to her side, gently drew back the bed-curtains, and cast the rays of the light she held in her hand, full on the sick woman's face. There she was lying, still and motionless, in a dreamy, unconscious state, her eyes half closed, her lips moving, but uttering no sounds.

"Look !" said Maude, pointing to the wan and wasted features of the poor singer. "Have you ever seen that face before ?"

There was no need for him to speak. She read

his answer in his face. With distended eyes, and lips half open, he stared down in mute amazement at the pallid face before him. He hardly knew whether it was a dead or living form he looked upon, so still, so motionless it lay—the wasted figure and white thin face.

“Why have you brought me here?” he exclaimed, in a voice choking with passion. “Why have you brought me here to look on such a sight as this?”

His voice, unnatural as it was, reached the sufferer’s ears. She opened her eyes, stared wildly about her, then, fixing her gaze upon his livid face, she sprang up with a wild cry. He seemed to shrink within himself, but still he never moved. Before he had time to recover himself, she sprang out of bed and threw her attenuated arms about his neck; hysterical sobs and insane bursts of joy broke from her lips. She laughed and cried alternately, and half-choked

him with her mad caresses. He writhed and struggled to escape from her grasp, as he exclaimed—

“Take this mad woman from my throat, or by Heaven I’ll strangle her !” and he stamped fiercely on the ground.

The poor creature seemed to know that he was angry. She let go her hold, and, cowering down almost to his feet, began to whimper forth some wandering excuses for imaginary offences. Maude touched a small gong; the nurse entered, and, without a word, quietly replaced the invalid in bed. Released from her embrace, St. Pierre once more turned to Maude, and entreated her not to let him be criminated by the ravings of a lunatic; but she stopped him, saying—

“You criminate yourself. Could you see your face, you would read guilt stamped on every feature. Begone, sir! I felt I had not misjudged you. Now you cannot say that I have wronged

you even in thought. My own heart told me you were guilty, and the white, coward look upon your face confirms the fact."

"But hear me; I can explain all, everything. You cannot expect me to be answerable for a woman's foolish fancies."

"No doubt you can explain," said Maude, scornfully; "you are as well able to swear, as to act a lie. I will hear nothing. I have seen enough, and I will not have my ears polluted by such a tale as you must tell, if you would speak of such a scene as this."

She turned away, descended the stairs, and entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Elmore sat, waiting the result of their interview.

M. St. Pierre followed her. He could make allowance for her anger, but he believed she loved him too well to leave him.

"I will neither listen to an excuse, nor admit a palliation. Here, on this spot, all communica-

tion between us ceases. Willingly, I will never see your face again. I wish to hear no words from you, or utter any myself. I will not speak except to reiterate my command—begone!” She took off the ring he had given her, and threw it at his feet.

“If you are a gentleman,” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, rising from her seat and pointing to the door, “you will need no second bidding. I, who am mistress here, repeat Miss Vernon’s words: begone, sir, or I will summon assistance and have you forcibly ejected!” She rang the bell violently as she spoke.

M. St. Pierre cast one glance on Maude’s indignant face, and saw that he had nothing to hope from her, at present at least. Her anger had not had time to cool. He was completely baffled; he had played his game badly, and at the eleventh hour had lost. He turned an infuriated gaze upon Mrs. Elmore, saying—

"I owe this to you; for I know you hated me from the first, and you will find that I know how to avenge myself."

A man-servant at this moment opened the door, in answer to Mrs. Elmore's summons.

"Show this gentleman out," said she.

M. St. Pierre did not wait for her to finish her sentence—he was gone. He knew that the less attention he drew to himself the better, and he had special reasons for keeping unnoticed now.

Maude threw herself into Mrs. Elmore's arms in utter self-abasement and shame. Her idol was broken, and as she looked upon its shivered atoms, she wondered how she could have given her soul's worship to such a worthless thing. She acknowledged that she had willingly suffered herself to be deceived—indeed, had helped to deceive herself, and in so doing she had scorned and grieved the kind friend who had watched over her for years.

Mrs. Elmore silenced Maude's self-upbraidings, and with true womanly tact endeavoured to reconcile her to herself. It was a difficult task. Maude sobbed long and bitterly, partly in self-reproachings, partly in sorrow. While Raoul was present, pride upheld her spirit; but now he was gone, gone for ever; she would never see his face again: and it seemed as though a heavy cloud had fallen, and would rest upon the world for evermore. She felt as though her heart had contained a treasure, the wealth of an upright, honourable love; but that now it was empty and void, and, worse than all, her faith in human kind was severely shaken, if not utterly destroyed. She upbraided herself for the rebellious spirit she had exhibited to Mrs. Elmore, and grieved bitterly for the grief she had caused to Arnold; in rejecting his pure, unselfish love, she had indeed lost the substance, and the shadow had proved a wretched mockery. She shuddered as she recalled

the fierce, fiendish glare St. Pierre had cast on the invalid's wan face, and remembered the cruel words with which he had thrust her from him; yet, perhaps there had been a time when his words were tender and his actions kind, when he had professed to love the frail one whom he had deserted, and whom he now abhorred. Maude felt a double sympathy spring up in her heart for the forlorn being her charity had succoured. She did not fling the scorn of virtuous respectability upon the helpless sufferer under her roof, but surrounded her with heavenly compassion, and an almost sisterly regard. However different their degree, they had both loved one man; both had been deceived—one had been cruelly betrayed—and Maude felt as though Providence had indeed cast the poor singer in her way, that she might soothe where he had wounded.

For some time she lay in Mrs. Elmore's arms, sobbing forth her sorrow and self-reproaches; but

Mrs. Elmore bent lovingly over her, and silenced her with a kiss.

"I will not allow you to reproach yourself so bitterly," she said. "You have done no wrong, darling; you have been deceived, that is all, and a man like that might deceive an older and more experienced woman than yourself. Come, you must not grieve for the follies that are past and gone; but kneel down this night, my child," she added, gravely, "and thank God you have escaped the degradation of becoming that man's wife. Go to bed now, and try to sleep. You must not let your thoughts dwell too much on this sad episode in your life; it will soon pass away, and you will then look back upon it as an evil dream."

"Of course, all our trials pass away in time," replied Maude, in a tremulous voice; "but still, we feel them when they are new, they lie so heavy on us. I own I do feel severely the shock I have just received; this severing of myself from what

I have loved (or believed I loved—it is the same thing) has hurt me to the heart”—she sighed heavily as she spoke; “but I have no doubt it will soon pass away.”

She went towards the door, but Mrs. Elmore called her back; her heart smote her for entertaining a thought of triumph; for, if the truth must be told, she did feel a kind of triumph in the annihilation of Maude's hopes, the destruction of her faith in M. St. Pierre; but she could not bear to part with her young companion, even till the morrow, with that sad, pained expression overshadowing her face.

“Come back, Maude, darling,” she said; “I have sympathized with your sorrow, and you must sympathize with my joy.”

“What is it?” exclaimed Maude; “but I can guess: there is but one thing that can bring joy to you. You have heard from Arnold.”

“No,” replied Mrs. Elmore, with a beaming

smile; "but I have heard of him. I told M. Herchel that I was sure I had seen my son in Paris, and he promised to make inquiries. I suppose he has done so; you heard him speak to me last night; the only words he said were these: 'Your son is in Paris; you will see him to-morrow; he will come and breakfast with you.'"

Maude did rejoice heartily, for Mrs. Elmore's sake, as well as for her own. If any evil had happened to Arnold, she would never have forgiven herself, for she would have considered herself as the indirect cause of it. She remembered their parting with pain and regret. He suffered *then*; she was suffering *now*. Both were sufferers from the same cause, though wounded by a different instrument. He was hurt in honourable warfare; but she felt as though an enemy had lain in ambush, and had smitten her when she least expected the blow. The thorns had wounded his spirit; but they had pierced her

heart. No matter ; if he would come home, and be again his old bright, happy self,—forgetting and forgiving the wrong he had received at her hands, *she* would be content, if she, who was the only sinner, might be the only sufferer.

CHAPTER XI.

CLEARED AT LAST.

MRS. ELMORE was up with the dawn, watching and waiting for her son. While all the other inmates of the hotel were at rest in their beds, she was astir, wandering like a ghost about the house, up and down the passages, and from room to room. She could not rest in one place five minutes together; and when the household began to awake, and the sounds of life and labour were heard on all sides, the servants, hurrying to and fro, met the grave, mourning figure on the stairs and in the passages, almost at every turn, looking

not sombre and sad as of old, but bright and smiling ; her very voice, as she bade them' " Good morning," was full of that tuneful music that arises from a joyful heart. They wondered among themselves what had worked so marvellous a change.

Mrs. Elmore was anxious for Maude to join her ; she began to get impatient, almost irritable ; to her it appeared selfish for Maude to indulge in any sad and gloomy reflections, now that her dear son was on the point of returning. Arnold, her boy, was all the world to her ; she had been anxious and full of fears, lest anything had gone wrong with him ; she had almost persuaded herself that she would never see him again, and now that he was safe and well, she hoped soon to clasp him in her arms ; it appeared to her that all should rejoice with her. She had crept to Maude's door many times in the darkness, and had listened to hear if she was sleeping, but a suppressed sound

of weeping was all that she heard. Now that it was broad day, she tried the door: it was locked; she knocked, and called aloud.

"Maude! Maude!" she exclaimed, "let me in, I want to speak with you; Arnold will be here soon."

"Let me alone," was the reply received. "Let me alone here; I cannot talk, I cannot listen. I want to be quiet, to rest, and to think."

Mrs. Elmore thought it best to accede to Maude's request, and went back to her own room. She watched from her window, impatiently and expectantly, for her son's return. It seemed to her, he would never come. Then her heart sank. Could she have misunderstood M. Herchel? or could he himself have been deceived? No; hark! this must be Arnold; she recognised his footfall on the stairs. She flung open her door; yes, it was he!

"My dear mother!"

“My dear, dear boy!”

Broke simultaneously from the lips of both, as they folded each other in a warm embrace, and expressed their joy at once more meeting again. Both had suffered much; it seemed as though years of agony had been crowded into the space of a few short weeks; yet each was unconscious that the other had suffered at all. It was a strange meeting. There was much to be told—much to be explained on either side.

“I am so glad to see you again, mother,” said Arnold, kissing her repeatedly. “Although I have been absent only six weeks, it seems as though we had been parted for years.”

“But why have you never written to me, Arnold? It was unkind—it was cruel. You know how anxious I have always been about you; and, under the sad circumstances in which you left me, I had reason for being doubly so. I have received but one letter from you in all this time,”

she said, reproachfully. "What have you been doing? why have you neglected me?"

"I have never neglected you, dear mother," answered Arnold. "There have been mistakes, misapprehensions, on both sides. I have suffered a great deal; and of late I have been most wretched, believing that *you*, my own mother, condemned and neglected me. I have often wished myself dead."

"What do you mean? I do not understand you," exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, bewildered. "Why should I condemn you? and for what?"

"I have written to you often," he added, not heeding her interruption; "and my letters were so full of pain and horrible forebodings that I feel sure, had you received them, they would have broken your heart. At the time I felt your silence bitterly; now I am thankful my letters never reached you! There they are; they were restored to me last night."

“Why, Arnold, the seals are all broken!” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, receiving the packet and glancing quickly in his face. “What do you mean? What has been the matter? Oh, I see; I need not ask,” she added; “you have been ill. My poor boy, although we have been parted, my spirit has been with you. I have been oppressed with a terrible thought that there was something wrong with you. But, my dear Arnold, you have now recovered. Come, tell me all about it. Who has taken care of you and nursed you? I must show them how grateful I can be.”

“M. Herchel, mother,” said Arnold, smiling as he answered: “the gentleman who brought me here, and whom I think we both know well. He has been my nurse, my doctor, my faithful friend, and—don’t be alarmed, mother—my gaoler too.”

“Your gaoler?” echoed Mrs. Elmore, sinking into a chair, her strength seeming to desert her. “Good Heaven! Arnold. M. Herchel has been

investigating my poor sister's murder. What could he have to do with you?" Her lips appeared to be glued together, and her words came forth with difficulty.

"What indeed! You may well wonder, mother," he answered, bitterly; "but there, don't look so alarmed: you see I am safe and well. Whatever danger there has been is past now, thank God."

"Thank God, indeed!" repeated Mrs. Elmore, fervently. She clasped her son's hand tightly, and drew him near to her, as though she feared he might be suddenly snatched from her.

"What was it, Arnold?" she whispered. "What was the danger that threatened you? It was something terrible, I know, for I can read that in your face, and I feel it in my own heart."

"My story, mother, is a terrible one," he answered, shuddering at the recollection of what

he had suffered. "I have been a principal actor in it, but I do not think I can speak of it. It concerns us both. You will know all shortly. Perhaps you had better know it now." He opened the packet of letters which he had given her, selected one, and handed it to her, saying, "There, read that ; it is the first letter I wrote to you ; it contains an account of the commencement of my troubles."

Mrs. Elmore took the letter with a trembling hand and read it to the end attentively. She looked up when she had finished, and said—

"Well,"—there was a slight agitation in her tone as she spoke—"Dr. La Belle appears to have been very polite to you. I think you did quite right in undertaking to escort the lady to Paris. You could not possibly have refused to do so. What followed next? I know there is something terrible to come."

"Read my next letter ; you will then be able to

guess the rest. I cannot tell it you," replied Arnold, in a smothered voice.

"No," she answered, impatiently, "I will read no more: you must tell me, Arnold; who was this lady whom you were to escort to Paris? I know well the evil came with her."

"Nay, the evil touched us both: it fell on her—on me. Mother," he added, putting his arm round her to support her; "when we reached Paris, I found I had travelled with no living companion; she was dead! Now, can you guess the rest?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, pale with horror, "I see, I understand it all now; it was my sister, my dead sister, travelling side by side alone with my living son! and they believed you guilty! Horrible! horrible! Arnold, my poor boy!" She threw her arms round her son's neck and burst into a paroxysm of tears. He soothed her tenderly; it was his turn to be the comforter now. He let her tears flow unrestrainedly for a time, for

he knew they would relieve her, and then said—

“Come, you must dry your eyes, mother, and look at me with your old smiles again ; there is nothing to fear now, as you see I am safe and the danger is past. I have a long story to tell, and I want you to listen to me calmly ; see, I can smile and be cheerful now that my trouble is over, and so must you.”

Mrs. Elmore smothered her grief as well as she was able, in her anxiety to hear her son’s story. But he decided on telling her nothing till she had given him some breakfast, and taken some herself ; then, while they were taking their coffee, he made her explain to him all the circumstances that had led to her arrival with Maude in Paris. Mrs. Elmore recounted most minutely every circumstance that had occurred from the time of his leaving England. He gathered from her recital that she was still ignorant of the fact that M.

Gautier (who it could not now be doubted was the real murderer) had been found; that he was one and the same individual who had taken so many *aliases*, and who had played so many parts with such profound skill and such consummate art too, that he had almost escaped the hands of justice. Indeed, to Arnold it was still a mystery how he had been discovered at all. He remembered, with a feeling of profound grief, the scene he had witnessed at Madame Radowski's ball on the previous night; he wondered how it had all happened. It seemed as though the entire scene had been arranged with an eye to dramatic effect, as well as for securing the ends of justice. The meeting of the several parties concerned in the drama was fraught with so much significance, that he could not believe it all fell out by chance. It must have been M. Herchel's doing. Arnold felt that, notwithstanding the important facts of the murderer being discovered, and of his own escape

from the disgrace of a trial and the danger of a condemnation, there were many more mysterious circumstances to be explained before he could feel quite at ease.

Arnold did not yet speak of Maude, although she was scarcely a moment out of his thoughts; he could see her plainly in his mind's eye, as he had seen her not many hours ago, with her pale, earnest face and mourning dress, and he dreaded lest the terrible truth she soon must hear should put her spirit in mourning too, and clothe her bright young life in sackcloth and ashes for the rest of her days. He determined, before leaving, to communicate to his mother the fact of his identification of Dr. La Belle, and of M. Herchel's brief intimation respecting Maude; the latter he felt too delicate a matter for him to speak of to Maude herself, and he knew his mother would choose the most fitting time, and communicate her news much more gently and tenderly to the poor girl.

As soon as Arnold had collected and arranged his thoughts, he related to Mrs. Elmore all that had befallen him since he left England ; dwelling as lightly as possible upon his own sufferings or the peril in which he had stood. She listened to him with profound attention, her various feelings sweeping in light and shadow over her face as he proceeded in his narrative. More than once the tears rose to her eyes, overflowing and falling slowly down her cheeks ; but she did not interrupt him until he came to his strange adventure at Madame Radowski's ball, where he had singled out the fictitious Dr. La Belle from among the company.

"You did not allow him to escape, Arnold?" she said eagerly, no longer able to remain silent. "Of course you seized and exposed him on the spot?"

"Such was my impulse, mother," he answered ; "but remember, I did not see him face to face ; besides, I was under M. Herchel's authority, and he restrained me—nay, forbid me to speak. But

I saw another sight, which made me almost forget that I looked upon my enemy. You shall hear of that presently. And now, mother, let us speak of Maude."

"Oh, not of her yet," said Mrs. Elmore; "she is in her own room, in great grief. M. St. Pierre, to whom she so rashly, and so much against my will, engaged herself, proves to be as unworthy as I always believed him to be. She has discovered all, luckily before it is too late."

"Discovered all! She cannot have done so, mother; it is impossible: she must be still ignorant of his greatest sin."

Mrs. Elmore gave him a brief account of the strange meeting with the street-singer in the Champs Elysées, and of the discovery of the miniature about her neck, during her illness, concluding with Maude's interview with M. St. Pierre, when they left Madame Radowski; and, anxious to hear her son speak of himself, for

everything else seemed of trivial import, she said—

“Come, you shall hear presently all you want to know about Maude’s affairs; now talk only of yourself. I must hear everything.”

“My story is almost concluded, mother,” he said, gravely. “But it is incumbent on me to speak of Maude, of our dear Maude. *I* am safe, but she is in great peril.”

“In peril! How? What danger can possibly threaten her?”

“I hardly know how to tell you. I saw her, however, last night, speaking to her affianced husband, M. St. Pierre.”

“Well, yes,” replied Mrs. Elmore, “that is very likely. I told you we had met him, did I not?”

“Yes, yes!” said Arnold, impatiently; “but you do not know who he is. We must break it to her gently.”

“Break what?”

“The truth!” Speaking slowly and impressively, he added, “Don’t shudder, nor think the truth too horrible to be true. Dr. La Belle, the man who met me on St. Catherine’s Mount, M. St. Pierre, and M. Gautier, the husband and the murderer of your sister, are one and the same man!”

As the last word left Arnold’s lips, the fixed, scared expression of his mother’s face startled him. She seemed to be gazing at something immediately behind him. Before he could turn round to discover what had attracted his mother’s notice, a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he started and looked round. It was Maude herself! white, erect, and motionless. Every expression had died out of her face save that of profound horror.

“I have heard it all,” she said; but the music of her voice was gone: it was hard and tuneless.

“Is it true, Arnold? tell me—I will believe all you say; for I know you would not malign even an enemy. There, do not look as though you pitied me, but speak, in mercy’s name; tell me, is it true that he—that Raoul St. Pierre is—was guilty of this horrible crime? Answer me,” she added, desperately; “answer—yes, or no.”

“Yes! as I hope for a hereafter!”

“But I don’t quite understand,” Maude murmured, passing her hand over her forehead, in a confused and helpless state of bewilderment. “You said just now it was M. Gautier; you also spoke of some other man—how, then, can Raoul be guilty?”

“The story is too long to tell you now,” replied Arnold, grieved to the heart to see how lost and wan she looked. “M. Gautier has taken false names to cover his false acts; he has been guilty of most atrocious and cowardly crimes. To you he was Raoul St. Pierre; to me he was Dr. La

Belle ; but to justice he will answer as Raoul .
Gautier."

"Then you mean to say—you dare to say—that *I*, Maude Vernon, have loved the husband of another woman—that he afterwards killed her, and then came back to give his cruel hand to me ! Oh ! it is horrible, horrible !" and, overcome with terror, and breaking out into loud sobs and insane laughter, Maude cowered down and sank upon the floor. After a while, the loudness of her grief subsided into a low, piteous wail, that was even more painful to hear. Mrs. Elmore raised her up, and tried to soothe her, in the tenderest manner ; but she would not be comforted. Her white face wore an expression of concentrated agony, and her trembling lips kept repeating the words—"Almost the bride of a murderer !"

Maude at length closed her eyes, and, leaning her head on Mrs. Elmore's breast, she murmured—

"Don't speak; don't try to comfort me. I feel as though I had a weight here at my heart, that was pressing me into the grave. Oh, I wish it would, I wish it would; oh, if you could carry me away, and hide me somewhere. I shall never forget him—never!" She paused, and added, "Almost his wife!" and the words came forth slow and thick, as though they choked her.

"*Almost* but not quite, dear child," said Mrs. Elmore, feeling acutely for the shame and horror depicted in her face. "You have to thank Heaven for your escape."

"Yes," exclaimed Maude, lifting her head, while some of her old spirit gleamed from her eyes, "I have escaped from future degradation, not from the past: that can never be undone, I can never escape from *that*; full of shame and sorrow, it will break my heart. I shall never forget that his hand, a murderer's hand, has touched me; his very lips have left a taint on

mine. No, no! do not touch me, Arnold! You, of all the world, should turn away and leave me. I will not be pitied by you!" she added, hysterically. "I was humbled enough before, but this is terrible. I am lost, disgraced for ever. *I* who was so proud!"

Overpowered by the rush of feelings that swept over her, Maude sank upon the sofa, covered her face with her hands, and hot tears of shame and sorrow gushed from her eyes abundantly. In vain Mrs. Elmore and her son united their best efforts to soothe and console her. They tried to convince her that no shadow of his guilt could fall on her; contact with unknown crime, Arnold urged, could leave no stain even on the purest spirit.

"Rouse yourself, dearest Maude, and do not give way to such remorseful grief as this," said he, encouragingly. "Afflictions are sent to purify and refine our nature, not to ruin and destroy us. We have both suffered bitterly; but this blinding

storm of sorrow will soon be past, and we shall then see clearer, and have other and higher hopes. You have escaped from a frightful evil, Maude, such as I shudder even to think of it. You have great cause for rejoicing, none for regret."

"I may rejoice one day," moaned Maude, piteously, "but not yet, not yet. We mourn for the dead who lie in their graves, blessed and at rest; why should I not mourn for the living, for him who was my all, but now is cursed with crime, haunted with shame, execrated by man, and condemned by Heaven? Oh! it will drive me mad if I think of it. If he is guilty, as you say, he will be tried like a common criminal, his limbs chained, his grand and noble head bowed down, his proud, manly beauty blurred and blotted with the foulest sin. Oh! I cannot bear it; I cannot forget that I loved him once." The last words burst from her hysterically.

Maude continued talking in a wild, remorseful,

contradictory strain, until her excitement wore itself out, and she ceased her self-upbraidings and regrets, from sheer exhaustion. Arnold looked at his watch: it wanted twenty minutes of twelve; at twelve, punctually, he had promised to be at M. Gautier's lodging in the Rue St. Honoré.

"I must leave you now, mother," he said. "I have an appointment at twelve, and it is nearly that time now. Take care of Maude; do not leave her even for a moment."

"An appointment! with whom? Are you likely to be detained?" said Mrs. Elmore.

"I cannot say," he answered, leaving her first inquiry unanswered; "but I will return as soon as possible."

"But where are you going, Arnold? I shall not let you go until you tell me," said Mrs. Elmore, clinging to him fondly.

"I hardly know whether it is right for me to do so," he answered; "but I will. M. Herchel

has desired me to call on M. Gautier at Rue St. Honoré, at twelve o'clock to-day, and I have promised to be there."

"Don't go—don't go, Arnold," said Mrs. Elmore, imploringly. "How is it that M. Gautier is at liberty? I would not have you face that dreadful man again, and alone, for all the world. I am sure that evil will come of it."

"I own I have a great disinclination to go," returned Arnold, especially as our interview is to be quite private. I do not see the reason of it, and I objected at first, but M. Herchel advised, indeed insisted, on my complying with his request, and I felt compelled to give my word that I would be there as the clock struck twelve. I must go at once; even now I must hurry or I shall be late." A parting kiss to his mother, a last injunction respecting the unconscious Maude, and he hurried away.

"Rue St. Honoré," Mrs. Elmore repeated to

herself, that she might fix it in her memory. She tried to reconcile herself to her son's departure, by remembering that he was but obeying M. Herchel's instructions ; she could not, however, feel at ease. She was filled with gloomy apprehensions, and the horrible presentiments of the last few weeks crowded thick and strong upon her brain and would not let her rest.

CHAPTER XII.

WAS IT FATE, OR CHANCE?

As Arnold hurried through the streets of Paris his mind was filled with a perfect tumult of conflicting passions. He looked back with shuddering horror on the awful fate which at one time had imminently threatened him. It seemed to him that he had never thoroughly realized his position until now, when he believed he had escaped from the difficulties surrounding him. He wondered how he had lived through the terrible mental excitement of the last few weeks, watching and waiting day by day for evidence which concerned

not only his life, but his honour. Had that evidence not been forthcoming, he would have died a felon's death in a strange land; and fate had so skilfully arrayed appearances against him, that all would have pronounced his condemnation just. It is true he had felt and known and seen all that was passing around him, but his senses were benumbed; he had felt, indeed, but imperfectly, as we feel what passes in a dream. Now he was keenly alive to all. His heart beat high and his pulse quickened with indignation, and he hurried on with a light step to meet the man who had caused such evil, not only to him, but to her whom he loved better than himself.

He reached the Rue St. Honoré, and soon arrived at the house he was in quest of. On inquiry he found that M. Michel lived on the third floor. He immediately ascended and rang the bell. It was opened at once by M. Michel himself, whom Arnold identified at once as the

soi-disant Dr. La Belle of St. Catherine's Mount. He had evidently just returned from his visit to Madame Radowski. On discovering who his visitor was (for, of course, he recognised Arnold at the first glance), there appeared no start of surprise; no guilty fear written on his face, but a severe frown clouded his brow, and a look of angry indignation pervaded his features. Arnold, amazed at the cool effrontery of his gaze, was the first to speak.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I am, doubtless, an unexpected visitor; but you appear to have forgotten me, Dr. La Belle."

"On the contrary, monsieur, I remember you well—too well, I may say. I do not know how you have slipped from the grasp of justice, and am only amazed that, after all that has occurred, you should dare to present yourself before me."

"Dare!" echoed Arnold. "Your coolness,

your assurance, astounds me. You are a good actor, Dr. La Belle, but the time for that is past ; there must be no acting now between us. I am here to accuse you of a cruel crime, and to demand an explanation, and I will have it before we part. You have exposed me to the peril of my life, and made me seem guilty of the act which you yourself have committed."

"We cannot dispute here on an open landing-place ; walk in : we may both have an explanation to give and to receive."

Arnold entered, and Dr. La Belle carefully shut the door after him. The apartment into which the former was ushered was a large and comfortable one. It was evidently that of a bachelor, and seemed to serve its occupant for all the ordinary purposes of life. Everything was arranged with scrupulous neatness and care. As they entered Dr. La Belle, unperceived by Arnold, locked the door and took out the key. He threw himself

into a chair, and politely motioned Arnold to be seated.

"Now, monsieur," said he, and a sardonic smile lighted his features as he spoke, "you can speak at your leisure: take your time, I am in no hurry. What have you to say to me?"

His cool, insolent manner enraged Arnold, and he indignantly exclaimed—

"You know well the question I would ask, and to which I will have an answer. Why did you send me on that midnight journey with the dead?"

"The dead?" echoed Dr. La Belle. "The lady was living when I presented her to you. You are yourself a witness of that. You saw her cross the platform and enter the carriage."

"You destroyed her life at the last moment before we started," said Arnold.

"You cannot prove the statement you make."

"I shall try to do so at least," replied Arnold; "and I have come here now——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you," said Dr. La Belle; "but in coming here to seek me out, you have done a very rash and foolish thing. It is the most fatal act in your life."

"That remains to be proved," answered Arnold. "Through your villany I have been surrounded with suspicion, threatened with shame and disgrace, while an accusation of murder hung over my head. You know I am guiltless of the crime with which I have been charged, and you must stand forward now and prove my innocence."

"You speak with child-like simplicity," said Dr. La Belle, with a scornful smile. "Why should I prove your innocence?"

"Because *you*, and you *alone* are guilty," said Arnold, solemnly, "and because God wills you should do so. You have committed the crime, and you alone must bear the punishment."

"Who is my accuser?"

"I."

"You! pooh—where are your witnesses?"

"I have no living witness, save God and myself."

"The one is dumb and invisible, the other *I* shall silence. It is not my fault, Mr. Elmore, that you are here; but it will be my fault if you go hence."

The speaker had been seated hitherto, throughout this interview; but now he rose and stood by the mantelpiece, and placed his hand upon a small oaken box. He touched a spring, the lid flew open, and he took out a pistol; pointing it direct at Arnold's head, and glancing at the time-piece, he added, coolly—

"In one hour I shall be *en route* for England; but I shall leave you locked in this room. You will fall exactly where you stand—*dead!*"

"Dead!" echoed Arnold, bewildered by the strange conduct of this extraordinary man. He

saw the pistol in his hand, heard the words he uttered—

“I shall leave you locked in this room. You will fall exactly where you stand—dead!”

And although he stood scarce six feet from his would-be murderer, his feet seemed rooted to the spot; he had no power to stir, even to defend himself. It seemed like a horrid nightmare; it was surely impossible that he, so full of youth and life, but just escaped from one danger, should now have to face another more terrible still.

Death stared him in the face—it stood but a few feet off; one touch of that man’s finger, and he would meet his God. The suspense was horrible, and his white lips could only echo the word, “Dead!”

He tried to rally his thoughts, to gain time and ask for aid from on high, for help from man seemed impossible.

“Yes,” said Dr. La Belle, in a decided and easy

tone, "Desperate men—and *I* am desperate—are always provided with desperate remedies. You threaten to denounce me, and I admit you might succeed in securing my conviction; but I do not choose to be convicted—therefore you must die."

"So must we all, at God's appointed time," replied Arnold; "but I do not believe that he has appointed my life to end thus. It would be horrible to die now," he added, shuddering, "and by your hands."

"Yet die you must; not now, but presently, and by my hand," returned Dr. La Belle, in a voice calm and terrible as the voice of doom.

Arnold inwardly resolved that he would not lose his life without a struggle, and kept his eye warily fixed upon his enemy. He knew that, even could he cast the pistol aside and come to a hand-to-hand struggle, the odds were greatly against him. Dr. La Belle was a powerfully-built and active

man; Arnold, thin, pale, and delicate, much shaken by debility and mental anxiety, and entirely unarmed. The distance they stood apart was not much, but a square table stood between them. Dr. La Belle seemed at once to penetrate his thoughts.

"Don't stir," he exclaimed, keeping the pistol pointed, his finger on the trigger, and his eye fixed on Arnold; "one step towards me and I will kill you on the spot."

"You are a coward, as well as a villain," exclaimed Arnold, with indignant scorn. "You give me no chance for my life, for you are armed, and I am defenceless."

"It is cowardly, I admit," said Dr. La Belle, apologetically; "but you must really excuse me, monsieur: circumstances forbid my being brave. There is no other course open to me: either you or I must die; we cannot both live in the same world. Fortune has favoured me; fate sets a

mark on you, and sends you here of your own free will to meet your doom, and I should be ungrateful were I not to avail myself of the advantage presented to me. After all, it makes no difference to you in reality, for, if I accorded you a meeting in the open country, and you had what you call a 'chance for your life,' I should kill you just the same." He paused a moment, and when he spoke again the words came hissing through his teeth, "I have sworn that you shall not live to marry the woman who has rejected *me*."

A new light seemed to break on Arnold's mind; the last few words seemed to reveal to him the true cause of Dr. La Belle's extraordinary course of conduct towards himself.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "then you knew me all along! You followed me to Rouen, and wound your infernal meshes round me there by design, not accident."

"No; there you are wrong. I give you my honour that my first meeting with you on St. Catherine's Mount was perfectly accidental. I will tell you the truth now, as I would tell it to none other; you can never reveal it, I know, for my secrets will be safe in the place to which you are going. When first you and I met, I was in a dilemma—to speak plainly, I was encumbered with a woman——"

"A wife, villain! I presume you mean," said Arnold, sternly.

"Well, monsieur, if you wish it, yes—a wife from whom I wished to free myself without any public inquiry or remark; but I could not, satisfactorily, manage my affairs alone: I wanted a little friendly assistance, and I sought yours. At first I hesitated, for I rather liked you, and did not wish you to be injured by any service you might render me. I did not at first recognise your resemblance to your portrait, which I had

often seen—our meeting was so unexpected; but when I heard your name, I hesitated no longer.”

“And why? What had I done to you?”

“I have told you that I was encumbered with one woman, and I wanted to marry another: that other I believed to be half in love with you.”

“With me!” repeated Arnold, and a strange light sprang to his eyes. “Take care: you are making my life worth a struggle.”

“Exactly the effect I wish to produce, to show how much you lose in losing life. Maude Vernon is a most enviable prize; and were you free, and she,” he added, with a sneer, “purified from my tainting touch, she might in time be yours. Her feeling for me was a fanciful, exaggerated passion; in her heart I believe she loves *you*. Do not stir! You have a few minutes longer yet to live. But advance a step, and your term is ended.”

Arnold had already imperceptibly glided some

inches nearer to his adversary, who continued in the same calculating tone—

“You see how perfectly candid I can be. I will now give you the three reasons I have for resolving to kill you:—first, that you may never see Maude Vernon’s face again; secondly, because that she-devil, your mother, hates me, and I told her I would be revenged, and to that end I will rob her of her son; thirdly, because you can furnish that evidence which would destroy me. Therefore you must die!”

“Must!” echoed Arnold, his passion for the moment now fairly roused, and forgetting the imminent peril in which he stood. “No! Were such villains as you permitted to triumph, to strew this world with misery and crime, there could be no justice on earth, no God in heaven! Ay, point your pistol. I am unarmed; but with God’s help I will now stop your cursed career.”

He thrust the table violently aside, and sprang

forward. Dr. La Belle, or rather Gautier, never uttered a word, never moved a step. He was prepared for Arnold's action, and ready to receive him. He pulled the trigger, and fired. Arnold gave one sharp shriek, reeled, and fell.

The shot, however, had no effect: he was not dead. A moment had scarcely elapsed before he felt himself gently raised up. He gazed around him with a bewildered, stupified stare: he was stunned, and almost blinded by the smoke which filled the room; but as this gradually cleared away, he saw his opponent standing, white and erect, exactly on the spot where he had last beheld him, this time, however, not alone. On either side, silent and grim, stood a sergent-de-ville, each with a firm hold upon him. He was their prisoner!

"Take courage, Mr. Elmore; you are not hurt," said a friendly voice, which he soon discovered to be that of M. Herchel. "We have lessened the risk you have had to encounter as much as we

possibly could. You were well guarded from all serious injury. We drew the charges from that revolver only a short time before you entered, and we have been concealed in that recess, that we might be witnesses of all that has passed between you."

The speaker then turned to M. Gautier.

"You may, perhaps, wonder how we obtained possession of your apartment, monsieur," said he politely; "but that is our secret; we have friends everywhere. You will, I am sure, excuse the liberty we have taken, M. Gautier; but circumstances compel us to dissemble, just as," he added—repeating the words which M. Gautier had but recently used to Arnold—"they forbid *you* to be brave. While you were enjoying the delightful society of Madame Radowski, our charming colleague, we have been inspecting your papers, and arranging your weapons of defence, so that you should commit no further injury on this gentle-

man, whom you have injured already, so deeply."

M. Gautier was caught in his own toils. He was aghast when his eyes fell on M. Herchel's face. The truth flashed on him like lightning. While he was sauntering along the boulevards, eating ices, playing billiards, and cracking jokes, as he fancied with a casual acquaintance, he was, in reality, arm-in-arm, watched and guarded, by an officer of police. Thinking of the manner in which he had allowed himself to be duped, he absolutely foamed at the mouth with rage; his broad chest heaved, and his eyes glared with the fury of a tiger whose prey has just escaped. He was speechless, literally choked with impotent, expressionless passion.

M. Herchel drew Arnold aside, and said, "Believe me, we were much grieved to compel you to undergo this trial, but it was necessary for the ends of justice."

"Why necessary?" asked Arnold, who was slowly recovering from the shock he had received.

"Because, after deep consideration, we came to the conclusion that your unsupported testimony might fail to convict him. It is possible that, through some quibble in the law, he might have escaped. Men like him are artists in crime, and work with such tact and skill, as sometimes completely to baffle the course of justice. Now, we shall try him on two counts ; first, for the murder of Madame Gautier ; secondly, for this attempt on your life ; and the confession he has made in the presence of myself and the sergents-de-ville will hardly fail to convict him. If he escape the one, which now is not very likely, he must be convicted on the other. You can understand, therefore, why we have subjected you to this painful interview."

Arnold had an instinctive feeling that whatever

M. Herchel did was right ; and, with the assurance that this was his last great trial, that he need not see M. Gautier again, except to give evidence against him in the court of justice, with shattered nerves, and a feeling of indescribable horror thrilling through his whole being, he returned to the Hôtel des Trois Empereurs, which was to be his home during the remainder of his stay in Paris.

In spite of the terrible situation in which he had lately stood, in the bottom of his heart Arnold Elmore felt a slow awakening of great joy. From the words uttered by M. Gautier during their late interview he had every reason to be hopeful and cheerful. He had said, speaking of Maude Vernon, "Her passion for me was an exaggerated, fanciful one, but in her heart I believe she loves you." The hopes he had believed crushed and withered began to burst through the gloom, and to bloom anew, and his heart was filled with rejoicing.

That night M. Gautier, *alias* M. Michel, *alias* M. St. Pierre, *alias* Dr. La Belle, stretched his graceful limbs on a cold couch, and his proud head rested on a pillow of straw. He lay in the Conciergerie.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

It would be useless, as well as unnecessary, to go through the tedious detail of a judicial investigation. The authorities were rapid in their movements with regard to M. Gautier, and soon got all the evidence together, prepared the witnesses, and appointed the day of trial, which came in due time. When the prisoner was placed in the dock he wore the same easy, graceful manner that had characterized him in his days of liberty and pleasure, mingled with an air of proud assur-

ance, as though he had looked into the future and saw a way through the danger that surrounded him back into the world again. On being called upon to plead, he answered, in a bold, firm voice, "Not Guilty." He had prepared his own defence in the most compact, skilful, and artistic manner. It elicited the admiration of all the lawyers present. It was marvellous to see how he turned every circumstance, no matter how slight or trivial, to his own advantage. He brought forward everything likely to cause discredit of Arnold's testimony, or throw a shadow of doubt on his credibility, and perverted the meaning of the very words which he himself had been heard to utter by M. Herchel and his concealed comrades, so as to give them quite a different import. He wound up by an eloquent and touching appeal in his own favour.

For a short time there was profound silence in the court. Then came the witnesses for the prosecution.

First, M. and Madame Hauberbin stood up, identified him, and gave evidence of all they knew concerning him; then Mr. Chester, whom the indefatigable Herchel had summoned from England, identified the prisoner as the man, his very agreeable acquaintance, who had travelled with Madame Gautier to Rouen. Next came the people from the little auberge at Croisset, and after them the *cocher* who had driven the prisoner and the deceased lady to the railway station at Rouen, on that fatal night which was to be her last; but when the real Dr. La Belle appeared, the sensation in the Court was tremendous, for it was difficult to distinguish the prisoner from the witness.

It is almost impossible to describe the varying expression of M. Gautier's face as these damning witnesses appeared one after the other in the box. Each one seemed to drive him nearer and nearer to his doom. When Arnold Elmore

stood forth, and again repeated publicly the story that had so often been privately discussed, the prisoner shot one fierce glance of concentrated hatred on him, as though he would be content with any doom if he might drag him down with him. He looked round to see the effect of the narration upon the judge and jury; but in their stern faces he read there was no hope for him. Up to this time the terrible feelings and passions natural to his awful situation had from time to time swept across his face; but now his features expressed nothing but a dead, frozen calm.

He was sentenced to the guillotine! Arnold impulsively turned round to see how the prisoner bore his fate. Gautier, the observed of all, stood calmly facing the judges, erect, white, and immovable, as though he were carved out of stone. His feelings, whatever they might be, were hidden in the recesses of his own breast, like

volcanic fires in the heart of a mountain; not a single emotion, whether of sorrow, despair, or shame, was permitted to reveal itself in his countenance. Once he lifted his hand quickly to his throat, as though the pigeon's blood which had sprinkled him in the Bois de Boulogne were still trickling its ominous way round it. He was well-dressed, and his toilet had evidently been arranged with special care. He looked so like an aristocratic French gentleman, that, notwithstanding the enormity of his crime, there were many in the court who pitied him.

Some got up a memorial, praying for commutation of his sentence to transportation to the galleys for life. Endeavours were made to prove extenuating circumstances,—a romantic tale being circulated abroad, in which Miss Vernon's name was freely mentioned. The beautiful English girl had a host of silent admirers in Paris, and the gay Parisians were by no means loth to accept her as

the heroine of this sad story. The law, however, refused to recognise the extenuating circumstances, and Justice held her course.

When the time arrived for Gautier to bid this world farewell, he took leave of it with calm composure; he had nothing to say, nothing to confess, nothing to repent. Such men as he do not repent, either in life or in death. Some, on the brink of eternity, will shudder and recoil, and send forth from the bottom of their hearts a thrilling cry for mercy hereafter, when there is no hope for mercy here. But Gautier was a man of a different stamp. He felt he had played for a heavy stake and lost. He was ready to pay the forfeit, and was too proud even to regret, or admit to the passing world, that he had failed. The mystery of his life was unexplained, lost in the terrors of his death. Those who saw him mount to the first stage, felt, perhaps, more for him than he felt for himself. He observed the

same scrupulous exactness with regard to his toilet as he had hitherto done, and apologised, with his accustomed politeness, for any trouble he had occasioned to those who had the care of him. With the calmness worthy of a better occasion he glanced up at the red guillotine, and then prepared for death, as though he were going to a place of rest. Whatever his feelings, or whatever might have been his thoughts during the last days and hours of his life, they were known only to himself and to his God.

Would it have been mercy to have sent him to the galleys, shorn of every attribute of rank and respectability?—the proud head lowered, the indomitable spirit humbled, the refined villain, nameless and lost in a mass of low ruffianism, mingling with the very dregs of vice, and driven in labour-gangs to daily toil, in summer heat or winter cold, to the end of his days? No; it would

have been a fate more terrible than the death he suffered.

Mrs. Elmore, of course, remained in Paris, for her son's sake, till all was over. To Maude Vernon it was a terrible trial; she was sadly changed; scarcely a vestige of her old bright self remained. Her pride was gone, the sparkling vivacity of her nature seemed dulled and dead, as though it would never, never revive. She was thoroughly humbled;—she felt she had lost her self-esteem, and should never recover it. It was horrible, too, to hear *his* name—the name of the man who had been her betrothed husband—bandied from mouth to mouth, breathed with execrations, and branded with crime. Every newspaper related his vile history, and his name, printed in huge letters, stared at her from blank walls, and greeted her in lonely places. Wherever she went, she seemed to stand face to face with some haunting memory of him. Abroad, the

voice of the world was strong against him. At home, the invisible shadow of his sin lay darkly on her heart; she could not throw it off.

Much of Maude Vernon's time was spent by the bedside of the poor invalid singer—the mute and touching evidence of one grave sin. She lay there, day after day, silent and still, a very wreck of fair womanhood. The one momentary glimpse of her betrayer's cruel face seemed to have had a fatal effect upon the sufferer, for, from the time she was torn from him, and laid back in her bed, she gradually sank lower and lower, till she faded out of life, leaving no sign, no clue to her melancholy history, not even her name. Maude had her buried in Père la Chaise, and placed over her grave a plain stone, bearing only the few words, "Rest in Peace," and the date of her death. Her child, the unfortunate little Raoul, was consigned to the Foundling Hospital.

One word in conclusion with reference to M. Herchel. The extraordinary ingenuity which he had displayed in connecting the various, widely-separated links of the chain of crime forged by M. Gautier, and the patience and skill evidenced by him in entangling the murderer in the web of his own construction, met with ample recognition from the superiors of his department, and he was at once placed at the head of his brethren; nor need it be added that Arnold Elmore testified his gratitude in a most substantial manner, to the man to whom he owed both life and liberty, and that which, to him, was dearer than either—his good name.

Maude, with Mrs. Elmore, and Arnold, returned as speedily as possible to England, since their departure from which they had all undergone such strange vicissitudes and such bitter sorrow. Mrs. Elmore and her son devoted themselves, with such loving earnestness,

to chase away the dark clouds that weighed so heavily on Maude's bright spirit, that in time she caught a glimpse of the silver lining, and learned to smile again.

THE END.



